

TWICE-A-MONTH

AUG. 20, 1928

The Popular

15¢

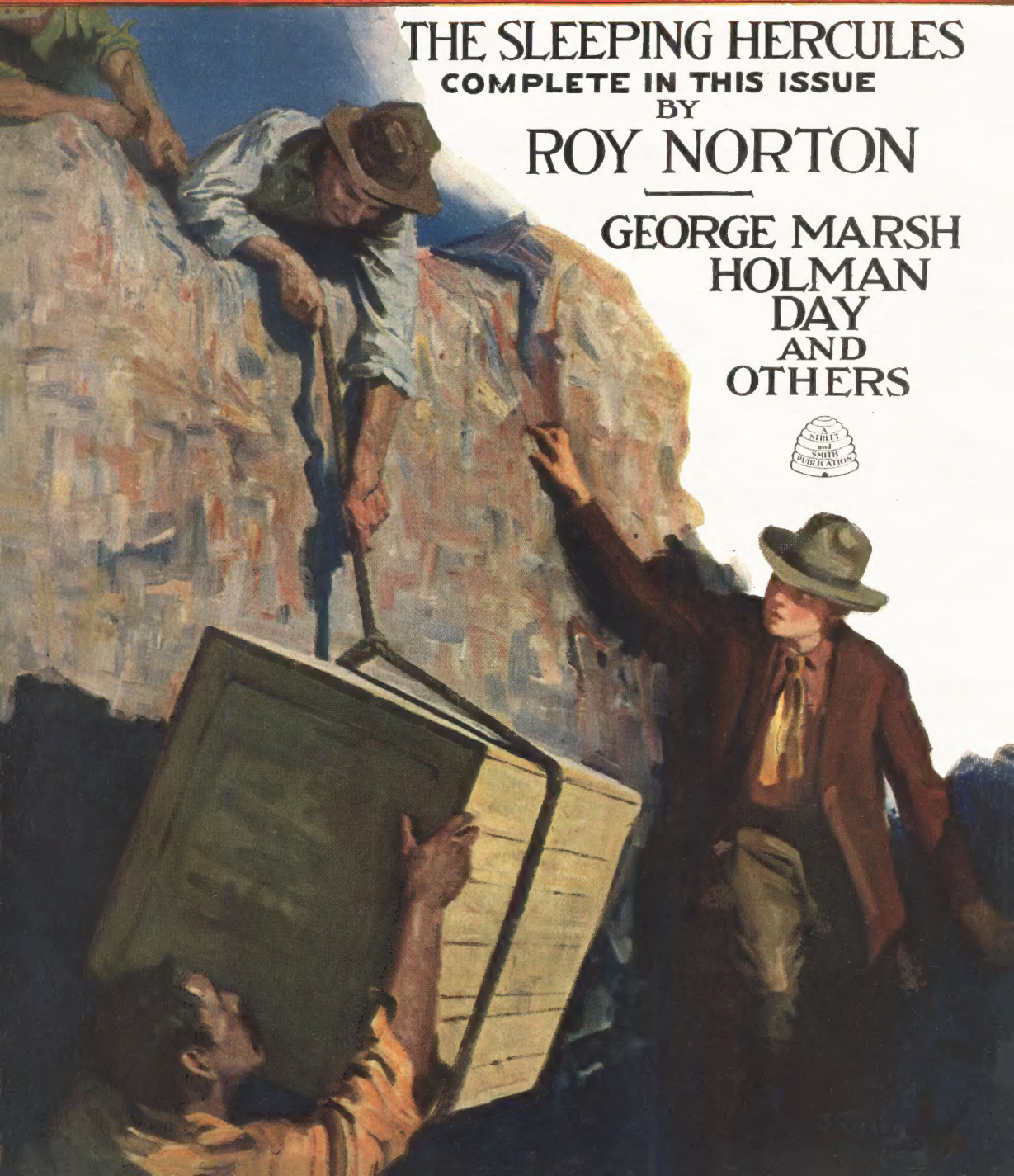
20¢ IN CANADA

THE SLEEPING HERCULES
COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

BY

ROY NORTON

GEORGE MARSH
HOLMAN
DAY
AND
OTHERS



RIDE 'EM!!

Beginning

Rodeo

A "Chip of the Flying U" Story

By B. M. BOWER

Bulldogging—bronchos rearing and snorting—cowboys yelling, laughing at danger, waving their hats—the crowds frantic—and speed and dust and daring—"Ride 'em, cowboy!" "Yee-a-ay!" "Let's go, old-timer!" "Whoopee!"

WHEN?

Why, in the next issue of

The Popular

SEPTEMBER 7, 1928

ALSO

The Sun Dancers

A Complete Novel

By CLAY PERRY

In which two young people elope and take to the forests, where they join forces with a mysterious Indian missionary against the menace of the unsympathetic world.

AND THESE AND OTHER SHORT STORIES

HIGH ADVENTURE AT TEIKELL, by Captain Ralph R. Guthrie
A tale of Alaska.

WHITE HORSE, by James Sayre Pickering
Jewels—their glamour, mystery, and danger!

HE JUST DROPPED IN, by Leonard Lupton
A story about a person you know.

The next issue of THE POPULAR will feature Clay Perry's new novel, "The Sun Dancers," and B. M. Bower's big new serial, "Rodeo." Mr. Perry's story is a startlingly different one about the big woods that he loves so well. The Bower serial takes up the lives of the Happy Family of the Flying U, after many years. This splendid issue will be on the stands on September 7th.

Volume XCIII

Number 1

The Popular

TWICE-A-MONTH

Title Registered U. S. Patent Office.

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission.

CONTENTS FOR AUGUST 20, 1928

COVER DESIGN	STOCKTON MULFORD	
THE SLEEPING HERCULES	ROY NORTON	2
A Complete Novel		
A unique story of Americans' dangers and comradeship in Italy.		
SNAFFLING STOLA	HOLMAN DAY	66
A Short Story		
How a young man defied a whole town, for law and order.		
TROUT AND MOOSE	MARK REED	83
A Short Story		
A prize fighter goes fishin'.		
COUNTERFEIT	ROBERT J. PEARSALL	97
A Short Story		
A dangerous criminal asks the sheriff to jail him!		
SUNSET HOUSE	GEORGE MARSH	104
In Four Parts—Part IV		
The smashing conclusion of a virile story of the North.		
BORROWED LUCK	ERNEST DOUGLAS	127
A Short Story		
All about a magic wooden leg and a Yaqui insurrection.		
A CHAT WITH YOU	THE EDITOR	143

Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1928, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1928, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, December 22, 1927, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, \$3.70. Foreign, \$4.40.

We do not hold ourselves responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.
All manuscripts must be addressed to the Editors.

Yearly Subscription, \$3.00

Single Copies, 15 Cents

By Roy Norton



Author of "Possession," "The Best Traditions of the Sea," Etc.

This story of Americans and Italians is about the findings to evade the customs officers and get it out of the

CHAPTER I.

UNEASY RENDEZVOUS.

FORBEARANCE is a great virtue, and I doubt not that all of us who, for a brief time, were drawn into the orbit of the Sleeping Hercules require it; for there was scarcely an action of ours that was not illegal. Furthermore there is not one of us who would not gladly give the Hercules for the restoration of but one of the lives it cost.

I am positive that even John Barnes, who coveted it, paid most for it, and possesses it, would be in full agreement with this statement; for great and powerful though he is, a world figure in finance, one who in his beginnings conquered with steel rather than craft, he is a man with a kindly heart. I have to appreciate this fact.

John Barnes is a superman, and I am not; but we have one trait in common, a love for old and beautiful things; objects that stimulate one's imagination; set one to speculating upon the character and skill of a man who carved an ancient statue; cause one to sit in the midst of ruins—anywhere—and strive to picture the life that existed when they were built.

I have, perforce, been a wanderer and my profession—for I am a mining engineer—has taken me into many strange and unknown places, and led to some peculiar adventures, and as a result of one of these I first met John Barnes. I escaped through the Andes from a revolution, in which I happened to be on the wrong side, and succeeded in bringing back to New York some rare Inca relics. Mr. Barnes' collection of such was distinguished and I thus got in con-



Hercules

A COMPLETE NOVEL

of a world-famous antique in Italy and the finders' strug-
country. There are sterling men and a magnificent girl.

tact with him. I thought they should be added to his collection; and, although I proffered them gratis, he insisted on payment. Discovering a mutual interest we became acquaintances, if not friends, and thereafter when in my roaming I discovered something of unusual interest, I sent it to him. That was all. We had neither business relations nor other contacts, until the Sleeping Hercules came into our lives.

Affairs hadn't gone at all well with me on the day I landed off the P. & O. in Naples, with less than five thousand dollars left out of all I had ventured in a wildcat oil expedition into the Sinai desert, down near where Moses led the homeward expedition. Moses, therefore, couldn't have been much poorer than I when he came out of it; but the odds were in his favor, because he did

have a promised land ahead, and I had none. But I did have hopes that I should find letters awaiting me in Naples accepting another project I had in view, and assuring what I stood in most sore need of—financial backing.

The Santa Maria Hotel is a modest one facing the fine old lump of a Castle Ovo on that beautiful gulf. I was known there. I entered it hopefully; but although letters were given me, they were not the ones I wanted. There was nothing to do but wait. I did so somewhat rebelliously, for to me Naples was an old, old story. Not even the fact that Italian is the only language which I speak with sufficient fluency to fool a native made my enforced idleness any happier. I amused myself by picking up the Neapolitan *dialetto* with its picturesque abbreviations, slang, and oaths; and then, after some days, found

distraction in visiting and watching the new excavations which were being made in Pompeii.

The excavators got to know me so well that after they learned that archaeology was my pet hobby, one of the chiefs obtained a pass for me and we used to sit on the dump above the work and dispute over our theories. The workmen would nod, and grin, and fling me their cheerful "*B'giorn's*" when I appeared, and the distribution of an occasional packet of the rank Macedonian cigarettes made of me a friend. It doesn't take much to cause an Italian laborer to think of one as a rich Signore Americano. My compulsory vacation wasn't so irksome after I found this new interest, and when I got a letter which prolonged the delay for a full month more, I was lazily contented—didn't care a hang!

Now the peculiar part of the whole affair is that I hadn't the slightest idea of becoming an excavator myself, and hadn't anything more than an amateur's curiosity and interest in such work on the evening when I boarded the little train that runs from Pompeii over to Naples. The "Big Chief," as his gang called him, and I walked out through the gate together and probably would have continued together had not the gateman stopped him as we emerged and told him that there was some one waiting for him in a big limousine which stood over near the Hotel Suisse. He excused himself and a moment afterward called to me not to wait for him, so I sauntered to the railway station.

As I climbed the steps of a car I noticed two of the excavators watching me, and when they saw that the professor was not accompanying me they nodded and grinned at each other as if pleased; but I paid no more attention and went into a first-class carriage and sat down. The train started and a minute or two later I saw the same two men appear on the platform, peer in through

the door, and hold a short conference. There were not many passengers in the coach, but I was beginning to speculate idly over the peculiarity of the two workmen's actions, when, somewhat to my surprise, one of them entered and came down the aisle. He halted when he came to my seat, and bent over toward me.

Rather strong of stale sweat and garlic, I thought, as he mumbled, in the clipped Neapolitan dialect: "My friend and I are very anxious to talk to the signore where he can be alone. We know something that might interest him."

"Yes?" I replied. "What's it about?"

"I cannot tell the signore here," he said. "But if he will come at ten o'clock to-night to the Café Bene Fratelli in the Via Cartole which leads off the Strada di Chiaia, we could—ah—be alone."

He must have seen a look of caution on my face, because he insisted in that same low, eager voice: "The signore need not fear; it is a matter of great interest."

I stared at him a moment, and remembered that I knew him and his fellow to be skilled excavators, and undoubtedly honest—for the professor had once pointed them out to me and told me they were two of his most trustworthy men. So I plunged and said:

"All right. I'll come."

Without a word save the customary, "*Arrivaderci*"—the equivalent of, "To our meeting"—he turned and trudged back, and I saw him and his fellow crossing into the workmen's car next mine. I continued thinking of what they had to tell me, and somewhat scornfully wondered if they had any idea that they could impose on me some faked antique. It is a common enough bunko game for which many American tourists with money fall heavily. Usually a story of how this wonderful antiquity would be seized by the Italian government if its discovery were

known; that great caution must be taken in removing it from the country, but that Americans are so well liked in Italy that their outward-bound luggage is but cursorily examined, and so on. That these two worthy excavators should try it on me, amused me. However, it should be interesting to see how they worked it, and I could therefore kill an otherwise dull evening.

At ten o'clock at night the Chiaia in these summer months was almost deserted. Its obscure length, its shuttered shops, its narrow, twisted curbs, gave it anything but a pleasant air; but the Via Cartole, when I finally found it, was worse. There are many passages leading off up the steep hill to the northwest of the Strada di Chiaia that are not too savory, but I will confess that when I turned into the Via Cartole I hesitated and regretted that I had not left my watch and money in the hotel.

There was something sinister about that dark, narrow alleyway—for it was nothing better—and the few dim figures visible had a furtive air that suggested many unpleasant or malicious occupations. For a full minute I stood there doubting the advisability of keeping a rendezvous in such a locality, and wondering if anything good, or even amusing, could come from it. The very selection of such a place seemed peculiar and fraught with menace; but finally, laughing at my own fears, I started up it.

I walked some distance in that gloom and failed to find anything suggesting a café. I passed reeking, dim hallways where men and women quarreled, or disputed; and through open doorways I had a view of the sordid, miserable squalor that can be found at its worst in this most beautiful city. High above me the stars were blanketed by clouds of laundry that had not been taken in; and some of it dripped, which indicated that its owners were compelled to do such work after a day's toil. Two or

three women passed me, flinging invitations as they walked, and falling to curses because I did not respond.

I discovered that the character of the street was getting worse, and was just deciding to make a retreat when a spot of light on the opposite side caught my attention, and I read the sign on the tops of the half-opened and lighted windows, which told me that this was the place I had sought. Even then I stood and regarded it for a time before crossing the street. I could see within its dingy interior a few tables, a makeshift bar, and in the rear a row of wine barrels. From its rafters were hung demi-johns, fiascos of chianti, and the general clutter of stuff that such a place seems always to accumulate, always dingy, dirty, and unkempt.

I felt that I was jeopardizing my life when I walked inside. Two or three men looked up from a table over which they bent as if fearful of police surveillance, and a hard-looking man clad in slippers, trousers and an undershirt that was badly in need of an incinerator started forward to ask what I wished. He was interrupted by one who jumped up from the rear of the place, hastened forward, and held out his hand to me. I recognized him as the excavator with whom I had made the appointment.

"Ah, signore," he greeted me, "come this way. We have a table back here, and the wine sold here is better than one would expect from—all this!" And he waved his hands about as if himself disdainful of the Bene Fratelli (the Good Brothers).

I joined him and his fellow; and I found that when he praised the wine, he spoke truth. We sat on crude, low, wooden stools, polished with much usage, and all about us was the smell of wine in wood. The solitary incandescent light, its once-white reflector now black with sleeping flies, barely relieved the gloom, as if perpetually fighting to save the place from utter dark-

ness. The proprietor returned to a huge chair at the end of his bar, settled into it with a fat sigh, lowered his head on his bull neck, and before we had taken our first glass, was snoring. The men at the other table got their heads together and resumed their muttered conversation. I wondered what plot of evil they were concocting; until Giuseppe—that was the name of the man who had brought me here—began to talk, and after that I forgot those others in that foul little winery. Indeed, his very first words surprised me, and aroused my curiosity.

"Signore Hall," he said, "excuse us, but we have learned much about you. You have recently come from the search of oil in the East and are known to be a man who does many things. You also understand very well the antiquities, and you seem to be waiting for some letters that don't come. Eh?"

"How did you learn all this?" I asked.

He merely shrugged his shoulders, lifted his hands in a Neapolitan gesture, and said:

"Because we have made inquiries. We had to be certain—*si*, very certain—what kind of *Americano* you are before we decided to tell you things. But first, is it understood that if you do not join with us you will say nothing to any others? We are poor men, *signore*, and have few chances to make what for us is a fortune."

Somewhat amused, and entirely skeptical of his having any secret that was of any moment whatever, I assented. They insisted on shaking hands. Giuseppe's partner, whose name I learned was Mario, being the first to proffer his fist and mutter, "*Compact!*" that customary *Contadini* word which is a pledge. They pulled their stools closer to the dirty little table, Giuseppe's black eyes flashed an inquiring survey of the others in the *Bene Fratelli* to make certain that none was listening,

and then he told me his story. I began listening with doubts, passed to incredulity, and then, after he had answered every question I propounded, began to feel myself wavering and believing. His honesty impressed itself upon me, and soon I was certain that whatever flaws there might be in the story he told, he had implicit belief in it. And what he told me came to this:

There is a little place outside the walls of Pompeii not far from Bosco Trecasa, from which, some twenty-four or five years ago, a peasant came with a jar of very fine old coins, together with a small bronze statuette. And this, by the way, was no news to me, it being a well-known fact. The peasant's name was Foscari. He was an ugly, gnarled old vine grower who objected mightily when the government officials, who had heard that he was trying to sell the coins to a once famous antique shop—which has long since passed and has now become the offices of a well-known American express company—stepped in and demanded possession. They took not only the coins but the statuette; and the latter, and most of the former, are now in the great museum in Naples.

One judges that the government of that day wasn't too liberal in its payments for antiquities. At least old Foscari wasn't at all satisfied, and thereafter devoted most of his spare speech to cursing the authorities, claiming that he had been unjustly treated—almost robbed. And to the day of his death he refused any information as to where his find had been made. In this latter regard he was as speechless as the statuette which he had unearthed and finally lost.

"That man," Giuseppe said at this point, leaning impressively toward me, "was my uncle. *Si*, *signore*, the brother of my mother! May the saints rest both of them well!" He paused to cross himself hastily; and Mario, his friend, grizzled, grim, and who up to

this point had not uttered a dozen words, repeated the prayer after him.

"My uncle had no relative save me," Giuseppe explained; "and for long before he died I took care of him. It wasn't until the day of his death that he told me where those coins and that so-marvelous statue came from. Now comes my secret, signore, which I trust you, no matter what happens, to keep. My uncle was digging a wine cave on that little piece of ground of his and he dug down into what he thinks must have been the atrium, or court, of an old country villa. Perhaps the home of some great Pompeian nobleman. Who knows? He said that he had found a column still standing, and a tiled floor; and then he remembered that to dig one must apply to the government and have a guard there to watch all the time. He felt that this little piece of land was his and—*Madre Mio!*—therefore anything he found must belong to him, to do with as he wished. And I agree with him—*e vero!* And now that land is mine!"

Old Mario shook his head in fervid assent until the rings in his ears twinkled and swung. And Giuseppe emphasized his belief by slapping his hand on the table. He awoke the padrone who gave one mighty snore, shuffled to his feet and came across, evidently believing we had called for him. I ordered another fiasco of that most palatable wine of his and we talked in whispers until he had returned to his nap.

"When they so badly treated my uncle," Giuseppe went on, "he filled in a big part of that cave of his and thereafter used it as a wine cellar. But what I mean to do is to find some man like you, signore, who will give Mario and me enough to live and work on while we do some excavating ourselves. Not with any government guard perched on the edge of the bank to watch, either, you understand. Then, whatever we find, I want this man to help us slip out of Italy and sell to the

rich Americans who would buy much stuff now and take it away if the government did but permit, which it so seldom does. We shall give you half. Most liberal, is it not?"

"So that's what you wanted, eh?" I asked, leaning back on my stool. And then it suddenly came to my mind that this didn't sound like the usual bunko game at all. Too modest. They hadn't a thing to sell me now and, as on questioning they admitted, didn't know for a certainty that they would ever find anything but an antique column. When I got that far it came to me again that even a good column with capital complete, even if the government did nab it, would pay all that I might be out of pocket. It began to intrigue me—that chance of finding something worth while, if we could get away with it!

"But," I objected after meditation, "how can you excavate without its being found out? First, others will see you out there in your field digging——"

"Not at all, signore! Not at all! My uncle built him a house of sorts over that wine cave. So we dig inside—out of sight."

"But the earth you remove—where will you put that?" I asked.

"Listen," he said, "that wine cave and house is but three meters from the wall of the house in which my uncle lived and died. We can make a tunnel through into the cellar under that house. It is not deep as the wine cave, but is big—under the whole house. Built that way in the old days when men used to keep their animals under the house in which they lived—donkeys, goats, fowls and pigs. If I make no mistake, if what my uncle thought was true, there would be room enough there for all the earth we would have to remove."

I shook my head doubtfully when I thought of the thousands of cubic yards of earth and volcanic ash that it had been necessary to cart away in the Pompeian work; but there is no fever on

earth like that of the archaeologist's, and nothing with quite the same excitement of chance as excavating. And even while I was pondering, Giuseppe's voice came to me with a pleading note:

"You doubt. But how can you, until you see the place? Are not Mario and I both expert excavators? Has not the padrone out at Pompeii told you thus? We know how to do that work. Before you refuse, signore, come and see for yourself. Will you not do that?"

That was easy, and I confess that my curiosity was working at full speed. I was not obligated to go into the strange and slightly illegal quest unless I wanted to. My hands weren't tied by any promise other than that of maintaining Giuseppe's secret.

"Yes," I said, suddenly taking the plunge, "I'll go with you and look at it any time you wish."

"*Bene! Bene, signore!*" they explained in unison. And then Giuseppe went on: "To-morrow I will meet you at Castellammare. To-morrow there is no work at Pompeii, it being a saint's day. It is better that we meet at Castellammare than anywhere else, because—well—it is not the same as meeting in Pompeii."

So we fixed ten o'clock in the forenoon at the time, and together passed out into that wretched street and down the Strada di Chiaia where we parted. And for a moment I stood watching them slip away like two ghosts into the shadows.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST FIND.

CASTELLAMMARE isn't a place that attracts tourists. It is, next to Naples, the largest city on the bay and is almost entirely industrial. It is one of the largest centers of the macaroni industry, and thousands of yards of the stuff are to be seen draped and festooned on long lines drying in the summer sun. It is too busy to pay much

attention to the occasional foreigner who comes there, and nobody heeded me when I arrived and was met by Giuseppe, who was clad in his gala clothes. I had never before seen him cleanly shaved and garbed, and somehow it changed him into a much more likable sort of person.

"You must hire the fiacre," he said, to my utter astonishment, in English, as if to insure against any one overhearing an Italian remark. "Take that one over there. Old man deaf; no speak English; keep mouth shut. When I say stop, we get out. Not go my place. Walk other rest of way."

"You're a funny fellow," I said, as we walked toward the row of fiacres and all the drivers suddenly sat up and began to shout and importune our trade. "It's the first time I knew you could speak a word of my language."

"I work in America on Delaware & Lack Railroad three years once," he grinned. "But you speak Neapolitan like—that! So very good. Besides, fine thing to keep mouth shut. Fool tells all he knows; wise man never. Besides," he added naively, "many times I hear *forestieri* say things they not know I onnerstand. And then—me—I laugh on my insides. How you think I pick you for men I want to interer' if I not listen all time you talk to professor? And me—I know Americans—which one right, which one wrong, and which one man who not bluffing. It take me long time to say to Mario: 'This our man.' But you make talk to this old man with skinny gray horse."

Flattery isn't unknown to any one of the Latin races; but somehow always we believe they are telling the truth to us alone. But I hadn't time to think of this, for now we were being surrounded by a gang of freebooters who did everything to attract us except seize and drag us to their vehicles. The whimsical thought struck me: "Once

aboard the lugger and the gal is mine"; so when I advanced upon the indicated man, the only one who didn't condescend to solicit us, I asked him his price by the hour, before boarding his craft.

"Too much!" murmured Giuseppe. "Give him half. That good price." And after one glare at Giuseppe, the old fellow cheerfully agreed, clicked his tongue, took the frayed feed bag from his ancient steed's nose, climbed up, waved his whip, cracked it two or three times and with shouts of, "*Andiamo! Andiamo!*" we drove away.

To save my life I couldn't take that freak expedition seriously. Too much like comic opera. Too much sunshine. Too much like Italy. I think I was still in that mood when, some distance from Castellammare, Giuseppe told our driver to halt, and then muttered to me:

"Tell him to come back here at two o'clock. We have feed in my house before you come back."

Obediently, if somewhat lazily, I followed the suggestion, and we turned over across the low, rolling swales that lie between Castellammare and Pompeii. Vesuvius was smoking off above us; and the huge, elevated, dead cone that had destroyed Pompeii, cut the horizon ahead of us. We left the main highway and entered one of those narrow, walled-in little alleyways, which twisted here and there. And we left this for a mere path between less imposing walls. It was scarcely broad enough for a donkey to traverse. It led us to a gate; and between rows of old olive trees we entered Giuseppe's domain.

The house was somewhat larger than I had expected, a rambling old building with an addition plastered on here and there through the ages, when one or another proprietor found himself slightly more affluent than his predecessors; or the requirements of a growing family necessitated more room. It was, in fact, a rather picturesque old cottage, anything but a mere hovel, and sat

like a sleeping old man at peace in the midst of a few ancient olive trees and vines. Mario, hunched like a gargoyles, awaited us on the stoop and relaxed sufficiently to grin a welcome and make an almost inarticulate, "*B'giorno, s'nore.*"

Giuseppe seemed still fearful of chance espionage, or curious neighbors, and scanned the vicinity well before beckoning me to follow him. There was nothing in the outward appearance of that old wine house to attract attention, save possibly its size, and through the decades men had become accustomed to it. It looked more than its twenty-odd years of age. When the door was opened I discovered that it was fairly well lighted inside from open spaces beneath the eaves of the roof; that a long plank incline led downward; and that around its sides were tiers of barrels, many of which, doubtless, were empty—perhaps all of them; for I never recall seeing one broached.

"Now, signore," Giuseppe said with a gesture, stepping to one corner, "my uncle told me that between five and ten meters beneath this spot can be found the column. By breaking a tunnel through there, on a slightly higher level, the cellar under the main house can be reached. You will observe the space in here that could be filled if we had to remove any considerable quantity of earth. Now we will go over to the other house."

He led the way back and to a double-doored entrance under, and at the rear of, the main building; and here I saw sufficient room to store all the dirt we could possibly care to conceal, if what his uncle had told him was true. The place was ideal for surreptitious exploration, and before I was aware of it I was mentally calculating how much of an expenditure would be involved in at least giving it a fair trial. And the more I thought of the matter the more

eager I became not only to go ahead with it, but actually to participate in it. I caught myself thinking that perhaps there was another way to test the honesty of these men; for if they had any concealed intentions they would most certainly not want me around while they worked.

"What do you think of it now, ignore?" Giuseppe asked anxiously, as if a declination would prove a great disappointment.

"Think of it?" I said. "Why, I am so enthusiastic about it I'd like to come here and help dig myself."

His face lighted with undisguised pleasure, and both he and Mario cried: "Good! Good!"

"Three workmen are better than two," old Mario growled. And Giuseppe added: "That could be easily arranged. We could tell people that you have had bad nerves and must get into the country for quiet and rest, and, being an American, no one will think it too strange if you were to come here to stop a while. They are accustomed to Americans who do odd things. If—umh!—you could pretend to paint a little now and then——"

"That's easy," I said. "In fact, I fool with water colors quite frequently for my own amusement. I think I could put up a good enough performance so that if an artist looked over my shoulder he wouldn't consider me too rotten."

"Bravo! Then it's done," Giuseppe cried exultantly. "Mario and I can make an excuse that we have to look after our vines and get laid off the work over at Pompeii without causing any comment. Indeed, we do that nearly every season about this time. When shall we commence, and when will you come?"

And thereafter, for an hour or so, while Mario threw together a quite ample luncheon, we discussed tools, implements, wheelbarrows, lanterns, things

that would be necessary for my own comfort, and provender, making lists as we did so.

It was decided that the purchase of some few articles of furniture for my use would furnish a blind, and that the wheelbarrows, and so forth, could be smuggled in with these. Mario had a friend from whom he could borrow a cart and two horses, and would with Giuseppe purchase the stuff in Naples and bring it over, timing himself to arrive in the evening, so as to attract as little attention as possible. I gave Giuseppe two hundred dollars in Italian money before I made my departure, and arranged that on the following Monday I would come to take up my abode with them. And thus was the first step taken. I had no idea then of the strange events which that day's whim had led me into. It is frequently the case that if one could have a momentary gift of second sight, he would avoid many misfortunes, but—— Live tamely? Live without adventure and probably grow old like a vegetable in some tiny garden?

The intervening days seemed to augment my desire to enter into what is one of the greatest games of chance possible in life, the quest for buried and lost treasures of art. None but a collector, aside from the archæologist, can appreciate it. It is on a higher plane than the mere quest for gold, for lost fortunes, for secreted gems; for there is a certain and distinct enjoyment—enormous!—in bringing back a thing of beauty for the delight, entertainment and education of mankind. I would rather have discovered Tutankhamen's tomb, though I retained no single one of its treasures, than to be the world's wealthiest man. As a matter of truth, I nearly forgot my own fortunes and the irritation of the delay which had imposed itself into my plans and projects. It is easy, then, to understand the satisfaction I felt when

I paid my bill at the Santa Maria on that Monday morning, stored my trunk in the hospitable care of the management, and made my way to Castellammare.

I found that Giuseppe and Mario, forgetting that I was a veteran campaigner in rough places, had provided me with unnecessarily comfortable quarters. I had a flash of wit sufficient to pretend great gratitude for their thoughtfulness, but my mind was on what might be found beneath the earth of that wine cave. I had provided myself with a working outfit, and suggested that we begin immediately. I saw old Mario and Giuseppe exchange a glance of amusement, and wondered, at this late moment, if I had been somehow let in for a hoax. And for a moment my spirits were dampened.

But Giuseppe seemed willing enough, and together we repaired to the wine house, where the new tools lay scattered about. Giuseppe picked up a pick, handed it to me, and strangely enough crossed himself as if invoking higher assistance.

"You, signore, are our luck!" he exclaimed. "It is for you to strike the first blow. There, in the corner, my uncle said."

I walked to the corner he indicated and drove the pick deeply into the packed earth; and then they joined me. I have done much manual labor in my life. I thought I knew how to use a pick, shovel and wheelbarrow; but they exerted less effort and accomplished more than I. Their ebullience vanished. They were stolid, skilled excavators once more, delving steadily, carefully, wasting no effort, never hurrying, never slackening. The sweat streamed from my face while they were still cool. My hands were tired when theirs were still unconscious of effort. But I pride myself that I persevered; that I at least tried to carry my third of the burden; that when we were compelled to lay

off work I had been a factor in its advancement.

Now I wasn't fool enough to believe that all we had to do was to dig a pit fifteen or twenty feet and come upon objects of rarity; but I confessed that when at the end of the third day's hard work, I sat with blistered hands and aching back over a bowl of macaroni, with nothing but the coarse Italian bread and some tinned stuff on the side to form an evening meal for three hungry men, some of my enthusiasm had lost its bright edge. My companions—no, I must call them partners—ate stolidly, lifting the long strands of macaroni upward, opening their mouths and letting it slide downward, while preserving an absorbed, contemplative stare.

We had exhausted our small topics of conversation; and when I dragged myself to bed that night I began to wonder if there were such mountains of earth to be removed as I had seen around Pompeii before we could find anything of interest. Dirt seems to be dirt, regardless of whether it is volcanic ash, decayed vegetation, lava, or mere rot. When one digs, loosens, shovels and trundles it hour after hour for three long days of fifteen hours each, he begins to learn that it's not lovable nor lovely.

We were by rough estimation twenty-four feet down when we began on the fourth morning. We had found nothing but stones and earth, all packed by twenty years' settlement and solidification. Giuseppe ambled down the long, steep incline, and I after him, with a pick. He examined the earth. Always it seemed to me he wasted time in doing that. Then, with an apologetic grin, he reached over and took the pick from my hand.

"I think either Mario or I had better use that to-day," he said. "You strike too hard. You are too eager. It seems to me a time for skilled labor."

That wasn't very flattering to me; but when I watched the way he now used the tool, loosening the earth more by an actual pressure than by a sharp blow, I asked him the reason.

"Observe," he said, picking up a handful of earth and holding it toward me, "the character of it has changed. It is a certain sign that we near the bottom."

I took it out to where the light was less dim, but couldn't see much difference. And then, even as I was comparing it with a handful from nearer the top, I heard a muffled exclamation, and old Mario, who had been sitting on the wheelbarrow, slowly got up and joined Giuseppe. I followed him. The pick was barely working now, so carefully was it used, and then Giuseppe dropped to his knees and began scraping and throwing earth like a dog pawing for a hidden bone.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as he straightened to his knees and reached for the lantern, which he lit with the utmost calmness before bending over and studying something. "See, signore," he said, drawing out of the way and beckoning to me.

I got down and stared at the little cleared place, and was by far the most excited of the three when I saw that he had uncovered a patch of mosaic. We had come to the floor of a house, or atrium. That dead man, Fascari, hadn't lied. In the face of the unexcited stolidity of Giuseppe and Mario, I curbed an elation that was almost boyish. But I failed to fool them, for Giuseppe grinned at me and said:

"Let us hope not too much. Mario and I have uncovered many floors, cleared out many houses, which had scarcely a thing of portable value. Even though they are interesting, they do not add to the finder's purse."

And with this dry admonishment, I climbed back out and we resumed work. A yard farther and we came to the sec-

ond proof that Giuseppe's uncle had not lied, when we discovered a marble column, standing erect. I felt some disappointment when its capitol, still in place, was carefully exposed and proved to be scarcely a museum piece—indeed somewhat less ornate than the average discovered in certain parts of Pompeii. As more and more of the floor was exposed, of a uniform excellence, and two columns similar to the first were unearthed, I began to fear that whatever this country residence might have been when Pompeii was a great city, it had not belonged to a man of sufficient wealth to contain anything very rare.

My disappointment was beginning, and my enthusiasm on the wane, on the day I felt compelled to return to the hotel Santa Maria in Naples to collect any mail that might have arrived for me. But Mario and Giuseppe seemed unperturbed; content to plod steadily along with no more signs of excitement or hope than if they had been working in their old gang over in Pompeii.

"Maybe we find something, maybe not. Who can tell?" was all one could get from them.

I went by the little *expresso* boat from Castellammare, and in due time stood at the desk of the hotel and received mail which turned out to be of no importance. To read it I had gone into the lounge garden and found a corner behind some palm trees where I could be alone. I had just slipped the last letter into my pocket when a voice that sounded familiar broke out in English:

"But, hang it! It's not fair! It's—umh!—hoggish! This country can spare something besides its mediocre junk and common antiquities without robbing its museums. What? Did I offer enough? Bah! Of course I did. Offered twice what the stuff was worth and got turned down as if I were a pauper. Wouldn't listen either to reason

or money, although any fool knows that to a struggling country money talks. The more money they have circulating, the better it is for Italy. For two cents I'd leave the blamed country and never come back again. That's what I'd do!"

All the time this emphatic monologue went on I kept trying to recall when and where I had heard that peculiar, irascible, high-pitched voice. I was certain that it belonged to some one I knew. Curiosity made me get up and peer around the screen of palms, and there, talking to a very modern, boyish-looking girl with an Eton crop, sat Mr. Barnes. I hastened across to greet him, surprised at meeting him in Naples in this off-season of the year; and he stopped growling and glared upward, when I called his name. Then, recognizing me, his face relaxed into its habitual dry grin and he stood up and shook hands and introduced me to his niece, "Miss Helen Blake, usually called 'Curly,' who has more sand than brains! Little devil, she is!" And Miss Blake, quite evidently inured to his rough badinage, ignored his comments and shook my hand as he asked me to be seated.

"I overheard you talking," I said as I sat down, "and was somewhat amused. You seem to have been ruffled the wrong way about something."

His good humor restored, he laughed somewhat shamedly and replied: "Well, to tell the truth, I was a little fussed up."

"The trouble with my uncle is that he's spoiled—too used to having his own way. Can't understand why he can't get anything he wants, no matter what it is," Miss Blake calmly remarked. And then for a minute they exchanged good-humored verbal blows, until he turned to me and explained:

"You know that collection of mine is now up in Boston? Well, the Roman and pre-Roman lot is its weakest point. It's just ordinary. The rest of the col-

lection has outgrown it; it no longer fits in; and I've wanted to weed it out and build it up. So I came over here at a time when there aren't a lot of fool tourists running around, like distracted chickens, to try to buy a few really fine specimens.

"I got on the track of a dozen good things, and what happens? Always the same thing! Government won't permit them to be exported. Must stay in Italy. Museum has first claim on them. And the hell of it is," he concluded whimsically, "that none of these Facisti officials is open to reason when it comes to making a little private deal. Fools! I call any man that won't take a bribe, when it's not doing his country any real harm, a chump! Yes, sir, a plain bonehead! After all, what do a few pieces mean to Italy, when it's got so many?"

"You're not so broad-minded and liberal. It's not that aspect that worries you at all," Miss Blake interjected. "It's just"—she turned to me—"that when uncle, the poor old dear, can't get anything he wants, he cries for it, and kicks and squalls like a spoiled kid!"

Then she looked at him, and he lost his air of annoyance, and beamed on her, and shook his head with such unmistakable affection and tolerance that I had a new insight into him. I doubt if there were a half dozen men on earth who would have twisted that old lion's tail as she was doing. There he sat, grinning fondly at a caustic criticism that, had any other uttered it, would have aroused relentless wrath, and an angry combativeness that could never have been placated save by the ruin of the critic. A relentless old fighter, Barnes, as hundreds of men scattered over the high financial section of New York as well as other places where he had passed, could have testified. Loyal to word and friend, but a bitter enemy and stubborn contestant to those who balked him. Self-made? Of course

Not always well mannered? True. But a man with sterling qualities that commanded respect from enemies and support from friends. He was not perfect. No one is; but, just the same, he was a big man.

His niece was called away and I started to go when she arose; but he insisted on my remaining, and when we were alone asked:

"Why are you in Naples now? Tell me all about yourself. You are always doing something I wish I could have done myself."

I recounted my Sinai experience, and, with a possible view of interesting him, explained the cause of my detention in Naples—the delayed answers to proposals I had put forth; the hopes of closing up a deal that had become inextricably confused. To my secret disappointment he passed it over as a casual exigency, vouchsafing neither word of advice nor sympathy. But when laughingly and in full trust I told him of what to me was but a wayward adventure in the fields of surreptitious exploration, he, to my astonishment, became intensely alert. He leaned across the table and stared at me with his hard lips parted and his keen gray eyes glowing with quick fires.

"And you found something!" he exclaimed. "Found that this old chap, what's-his-name, hadn't lied, and that there is actually some sort of a suburban home buried down there under that property. Look here! It strikes me that you may have fallen into a more promising thing than you appreciate. Lord! How I wish I were young myself!"

"We may find nothing worth while," I said; but he had shifted his eyes to a vacant stare and seemed not to have heard me.

"Look here," he said, suddenly turning to me again, "if you find anything worth having, let me know first. Keep it to yourselves. I've got an idea that

——" He paused, stared at the floor again for a time, and then said: "I've got to go up to Rome, and from there to meet some people in Milano. I'll not be gone more than a week or ten days. My niece is going to wait here for me. You can trust her. She's not so foolish as she seems. She's interested in anything unusual, and while I'm gone you can look after her. Can't you take us out there to see what you're doing? Then, where you come in is this: If you do uncover something good, I want the first chance at it. If I could get the best of this gang that has blocked every purchase I've made, I'd—well, make it worth your while. But I'd love to go out and see that hole; and I know Curly would, too. You see, I like to humor her. Only niece I've got. Only person on earth that doesn't give a damn what she says to me. Wonderful girl."

For a moment I considered; and then, confident that neither Giuseppe nor Mario would object, I assented. I didn't know that I had taken the second step into the labyrinth that Fate, Luck, or whatever it is, lays down before our feet.

CHAPTER III.

BURGLARY AND HOLDUP.

MY partners in that strange enterprise were astonished when I returned with two visitors, and it was not until I drew them to one side and gave a confidential explanation that old Mario's face lost its surly frown. But Giuseppe welcomed them and reassured Mario with: "Didn't I tell you that our signore knows the way to do things of which you and I would be ignorant? See, already he has found us a prospective market for what finds we may make."

"Not so fast," I cautioned him. "If we find nothing out of the ordinary, he doesn't want it, but——"

"I have vowed a score of large candles to the shrine by the fountain if we

find something rare. So we shall not fail," Giuseppe piously exclaimed. But old Mario merely shook his head and muttered something about that particular shrine being without efficacy, since he himself had tried it on many occasions without appreciable results.

It was to me somewhat strange to see that hard old financial lion, Mr. Barnes, become eager and engrossed in what we had uncovered at the bottom of that hole. Moreover, we learned that he must have given considerable study to the subject, for he made deductions which were most interesting. For instance, that other researches had established the fact that it was frequently the custom of the wealthy Pompeians who owned homes outside the city walls to purposely build them plainly, but to carry with them to those summer abodes their most prized possessions, returning them to their palatial residences in the city when they retired there for the winter. Pompeii was destroyed at a time when such a nobleman might well be in his suburban residence.

Another surprise came when we learned that Miss Blake spoke a most flawless Italian, which she explained by the fact that she had lived and studied three years in Florence and Siena, both of which have the purest Italian of Italy. Mario, himself a Calabrian, but who spoke good Italian, quickly began a conversation with her and for the first time showed volubility. Then, on making their departure, she announced that with our consent she would like to come each day and watch the work, I was troubled. I wanted no women around. But it was old Mario who said: "Why not? The signorina shall be my good luck. Giuseppe has his in that shrine."

It was I who objected, explaining the desire to avoid attracting attention to Giuseppe's little place, and that I posed as a painter at odd times. She waved that merrily aside with the remark that she could do the same and that painters

were always supposed to flock together. Moreover, she proposed to transfer at once her domicile to a hotel in Castellammare, from which she could saunter forth each day without causing comment, and Barnes promptly sided with her, so that before I could make any pronounced and decisive objection, the whole matter was settled.

Prior to her next visit, on the following day, I indulged in many doubts as to the wisdom of all this, and had no hesitancy in expressing them. I learned that I was up against the taciturn old Mario in earnest, and that he had really a superstition that her advent would bring good fortune. There isn't the slightest use in combating an Italian's superstition. Once imbued with it and centered upon one thing, it is wise to leave that particular thing unmolested. Giuseppe seemed to care very little, either one way or the other. His mind was too much up in the clouds by this time. All I could hope for was that she would soon tire of this adventure, and make her visits rare; but on her third visit all this, too, was brushed aside by a peculiar incident.

She came early on the third morning, clad in a rough tweed outfit and carrying an artist's camp stool and portable easel, which she dumped down on the nearest wine barrel announcing, "I've come to dig. Mario says I am his good luck, so, please may I try?"

Then before Giuseppe or I could object she had tripped down the incline, and Mario, who was at the bottom, had handed her his pick and she was beginning to try to follow his instructions. She had struck no more than a half dozen blows before an extraordinary thing happened.

"I've hit something!" she cried. "I know I've found something!"

And I'm blest if she hadn't! In considerable excitement we crowded close while Mario carefully worked around an object which, on being fully uncov-

ered, proved to be an exquisite little statue, a grotesque, perched on the edge of an impluvium, or sunken fountain, in the middle of the court. We carried it out and cleansed it in a barrel of water we had on hand, and there it appeared, clean and white, its absurdly humorous face grinning up at us and its whole figure unmarred save for a slight fresh abrasion on the base, inconsequential, where the pick point had struck it after its centuries of concealment.

I don't know whether old Mario or Miss Blake was the most excited. Indeed, all of us were, more or less, for while the find was nothing wonderful, it was good enough to please and also to encourage us in the hope that we might unearth something of great rarity. And that ended any question of Miss Blake's absence from the work. She immediately proposed that a room of Giuseppe's scattered dwelling should be fitted up for her use, and it was in vain that I protested. I offered a score of objections. She offset them one by one with quick ingenuity. I told her she couldn't endure our fare. She said she proposed to do the cooking herself and that Mario would wash the dishes. Finally I argued that it would cause a scandal if ever it were known that she had——

"Nonsense! There's safety in numbers, and besides, no one is ever likely to know anything about it," she interrupted.

"But for Heaven's sake be reasonable! What about your uncle?" I cried.

"Uncle Johnny knows I can take care of myself," she retorted. "Besides, he knows I always do what I wish, and usually grins and helps me. Now what have you got to say?"

What could I say in the face of the combined opposition against me? For now both Giuseppe and Mario backed her up with gesticulating hands and a torrent of words that fairly drove me

outdoors to get peace. I was helpless. And on the next night thereafter she was installed. I fervently hoped she would prove a bad cook, but she didn't. Quite the contrary. So much so that those Italian partners of mine raved about the food. I then hoped she would get in the way of work. Again, she didn't, but actually helped. She had surprising strength for one of her graceful body, and, from long athletic training, knew how to use it. Every action of hers seemed to prove me a fool in my objections to her presence.

Then, on top of all this, she actually made the second discovery, a companion piece to the one first found, and declared that when we had uncovered the entire set—for it was certain there would be two more on the other corners of the reservoir—her uncle would be delighted to buy them. Thus, cunningly, she worked upon the cupidity of Giuseppe and Mario, and the work redoubled its vigor.

For a week we delved about fifteen hours a day, and in that time had found the other two pieces, a fairly good small statue as the center piece of the fountain, and six really exquisite small bronzes surrounding it. They were really the best pieces of the lot and, familiar as I was with Pompeiiana, I couldn't remember any precisely like them. We disputed over this more or less, Giuseppe insisting that there were two the same, or very similar, in the museum in Naples, and, inasmuch as it would be necessary for both Miss Blake and me to make a trip to the big city, we agreed to go together and visit the museum to decide the point.

Mario and Giuseppe then suggested that they were entitled to a day's rest, and declared their intention of accompanying us. I suspected that they, too, intended to satisfy themselves as to the museum specimens, for while they agreed on most matters, on others they were always at good-humored diver-

gence. Furthermore, both were inveterate gamblers, setting each other small wagers on a half dozen different things in the course of every day.

We concealed our finds by knocking the heads out of barrels and placing the statues therein, with the barrels up-ended. We had already strengthened the solid old doors of the wine house inside and replaced the clumsy old catch with a very strong and modern lock, so felt that there was no risk in leaving the place unwatched. Moreover, we were certain that we had evoked not the slightest curiosity regarding us, or our affairs. So we took our first rest.

Mario and Giuseppe went by the train from Pompeii, while Miss Blake and I went from Castellammare. We had agreed beforehand that we should return on the following evening's boat; and, to be frank, I wasn't at all loath to have Miss Blake's company. She had proved such a cheerful "good fellow," despite my first opposition; such a help; and, after all, somewhat confirming Mario's first declaration, such a bearer of good fortune, a mascot, that she had become more than acceptable to all of us. When we got discouraged, she was sanguine. When we were tired, she was tireless. When we were bored with the monotony, she enlivened it. I don't know why, but—well, somehow, that girl was sunshine.

My mail proved somewhat encouraging. Sufficiently so to make me hopeful for the project I had in mind when I came to Naples. Hers carried the news that her uncle had gone on to Paris and from there must attend some sort of a conference in London, and advised her that if she was tired of Naples she could join him in the latter place. She laughed when she scanned it, and then read that portion aloud to me and said:

"Tired? Why I'm having the most exciting time of my life! I wouldn't leave our little house and our treasure

cave over there for a present of Westminster Abbey. Now let's get over to that museum!"

We had a wonderful time that day. She was such a good companion; and, though Giuseppe's insistence that there were four similar pieces to ours in the museum proved true, we knew from a conversation with the curator that ours were valuable and rather rare. No fortune in them, but I was assured that we could divide a small profit, even if we were eventually compelled to dispose of them to some local antiquarian. That, for one who had no great bank account, was comforting. I knew, now, that if we discovered nothing else, I should not be out of pocket for my financing of our little enterprise.

Miss Blake voluntarily accompanied me while I made some small purchases, and I reciprocated by going with her to various shops where she made hers. That night we dined at one of those pleasant little places out on the rocky isle that holds the huge Castello dell'Ovo. There was some sort of an evening reception on at the yacht club, sheltered across the pool, and the sound of a band was softened by the waters intervening. It was a semipublic affair, and the proprietor of the place at which we dined gave us a card; so we went around to the club, were welcomed, and danced on the long terrace.

Miss Blake could dance! And the music was good! I forgot whatever anxieties I had. If she had any, she, too, forgot them; and so there, with the lights mirrored in the quiet waters, with romance hovering over a place that from an age of years before the Christian advent was given to romance, we surrendered ourselves to enchantment. It seems to me, now, in retrospect, that we had no thought of each other save as good comrades; and that our conversation was that of comrades; that we were happy in being together with the subknowledge that we were of a sort

of family, living in the same house, involved in kindred adventure. I do distinguish this; that whatever objection I had had against her when she intruded upon us there at Giuseppe's house was obliterated; and from that night, without her, the enterprise would have been savorless.

We constituted, in fact, a happy little party when reunited at Giuseppe's house, and that night drank all sorts of toasts in bottles of light wine we had brought back from our holiday. The next morning we again fell to work with a new feeling of inevitable success. It was toward noon when we made our next find. It was a small but perfect alabaster vase which had been used for flowers; and when we carried it out and cleansed it, I thought it was beautiful. We stood admiring it until old Mario, the practical, growled:

"Well, we won't do much if we stand here all day. I'll put it in one of the barrels with the other things, and then we'll see what next."

I trundled the wheelbarrow down the incline and Giuseppe followed me with a shovel in his hand. And then, from up in the wine house, we heard a sudden inarticulate growl, and old Mario's loud oaths.

"What's the trouble?" Giuseppe cried, turning back. And I, fearing that Mario had dropped and broken that lovely vase, abandoned the barrow and retraced my steps. Miss Blake was standing at one side with a grave face, and Mario was overturning the barrels in which we had hidden our other treasures. They were empty! There wasn't a single thing, even a small trifle, left. Some one had completely cleaned the place out during our absence.

For a few seconds we stood there silent, aghast, and then angry.

"*Per Bacco!* Who do you suppose did that, and how?" Giuseppe roared in a hoarse voice, looking from one to the other of us.

I said nothing but began scrutinizing the earthen floor. It was too hard to bear any clean imprint, and such marks as it had were scratches made by the hobnails of our own working boots. I went across and examined the heavy lock on the door. It seemed not to have been tampered with, and would have been a difficult one to pick. I looked upward and studied the roof to see if any of the narrow openings had been enlarged sufficiently to admit a human being, but all were intact.

I ran outside and scanned the tiles of the roof. Plainly they had not been disturbed, or if so the removal and replacement had been done with such cunning that no indication of the work remained. I bade the others all stand still and made a long and careful examination of the ground completely around the wine house, and found not even a single footprint, although in most places the soil was loose enough to have taken an imprint. It was a mystery how the theft had been accomplished; and we agreed, after much discussion, that it could have been done only through the door. And that, owing to the character of the lock, seemed impossible.

"It couldn't have been done by any common thief," I asserted. "None but a highly skilled burglar could have found any means of opening that lock, and burglary is a form of thieving that isn't very highly developed in Naples, or this part of the world."

"*Manna mia!*" Giuseppe exclaimed, slapping his hand to his forehead with a loud spat and scowling. "There is one such man in Napoli! Do I not know him? Ah, fool that I am! Did I not wonder where and when I had seen that man's face? And now it comes back. I saw him being tried in Newark, New Jersey, for burglary, and he was sentenced to five years. And—yes, *per Bacco!* he would have been set free nearly a year ago; and he was one of the men sitting at that other table

in the Bene Fratelli that night when we talked."

"But how could he have overheard us?" demanded Mario doubtfully. "He was too far away. We talked very quietly. He couldn't have."

"But that fat-necked padrone who we thought was asleep—he could have heard us," Giuseppe persisted. "His repute is not too good. He has been known to harbor men wanted by the law. Suppose he overheard and told the others, or one of the others—this man I saw bundled off to prison in America? Suppose they just watched and waited to see if we did find anything, and——"

I carry in my pocket, always, a double magnifying glass of the prospector's type used to examine ore, and now I hastened to the door and made a more careful inspection of that lock. I thought I discovered a trace of wax, but couldn't make certain, so seized a screw driver from a box of tools that had been stowed in a corner, removed the lock, and took it carefully to pieces while all the others intently watched.

There on the inside we got the proof of how the theft had been accomplished, for the wards were covered here and there with the wax that locksmiths use when making an impression to file a duplicate key. The wax had been applied many days before, for it had slightly hardened. I came to the conclusion that in some previous night, perhaps a week or ten days preceding our visit to Naples, the impression had been taken, a false key made, and, finally, in the time of our absence, used to rob us. It would have been possible, so soundly did we all sleep after such hard work, and with the slight isolation of the wine house at the rear of the main dwelling, for the thief to have made almost nightly visits to note the progress of our work and keep track of our discoveries. He had merely bided his time until our collection should become valuable

enough to make its theft worth while. I expounded my theory to the others, who listened attentively.

"But," objected Miss Blake, "why do you suppose he didn't wait still longer, until we got something of really great value? It seems to me that is the weak point in your theory. What's a little sum like a few thousand lire?"

"No, no, no! It's a lot for that kind of a man," Giuseppe protested. "Who knows? He probably has little idea of the value of such things and probably would think what we had found worth a hundred thousand lire. Again, such a man might want money so badly he wouldn't wait for bigger things, but take what he could get."

Considering this, I was inclined to agree with Giuseppe. A few thousand lire doubtless seemed a small sum to Miss Blake, whose ideas of the value of money must be very vague, she having been brought up in an atmosphere of millions of dollars. But to a notorious criminal driven out of the country with much he was familiar by the police, and now returned to a land devoid of the same rich opportunities, any haul, though comparatively small, might prove tempting. He might take the risk. Risk? And then in one quick leap another feature of the utmost significance came to me, and I pointed our position out to the others.

"You see that's not the worst of our situation. Not by any means! We can't get police aid or protection. We daren't even tell any one of our loss. We're not doing this work legally because we haven't a permit, and if the police knew we were secretly excavating, we, ourselves, would all be arrested and either heavily fined or a criminal charge laid against us. We can't do a thing, and whoever stole that stuff can laugh at us and our helplessness!"

Old Mario's hand went up with a gesture of discontent. Giuseppe stared blankly for a moment, and then said:

"*Madonna mia!* It's true! I hadn't thought of that. The government would look on us as thieves, and when a thief steals from a thief, the police do but grin."

Then suddenly Miss Blake laughed—laughed repeatedly, as if delighted with a good joke and amused by our confusion. It was such a free laugh that suddenly, despite our own chagrin, we, too, had to participate—somewhat sadly, it is true, but with an admission of the humorous predicament in which we found ourselves. I reassembled the lock and replaced it on the door, thoughtfully, while contemplating this unpleasant episode and its possibilities from several angles. My principal concern was whether we dared drop the matter, leaving this thief who had the advantage of us at large. He could do one of two things—either try to rob us again, or, failing in that, send an anonymous message to the officials and thus warn them of our illicit work. We could not risk a search.

It is a mistake to think there is honor among thieves, but there is such a thing as a mutual bond of fear. When I had replaced the lock, I discussed this side of our position with the others, and I still have in mind the picture of old Mario scratching his bristling, grizzled head with his stubby fingers, Giuseppe leaning against the wall with his handsome eyes fixed on my face, and there, seated on a barrel, swinging her dainty feet and smoking a cigarette, the boyish Miss Blake. There was no doubt in my mind that she was the only one of us who regarded the episode as a great lark; the only one who derived any amusement from it.

"Now," said I, at last, "it seems to me there is but one way in which we can at least partially protect ourselves. We've got to find out who stole that stuff, get as much proof against him as if we intended to have him arrested and convicted, and put the fear of the

law into him, so we can hold that as a club over his head. In fact, we've got to throw enough of a fright into him so that we can make a sort of compact with him—a child's bargain!—that he's to leave us alone and in return we leave him alone. We've got to let him understand that if he pulls us down, we wreck him along with ourselves. Now! Do you, Giuseppe, or you, Mario, think of any way by which we can learn who stole the stuff?"

Both scowled thoughtfully for a time. But it was old Mario who finally vented a hoarse chuckle and blurted:

"I think I could. It might take a few days but——"

He stopped and grinned rather shamefacedly, started to speak, then subsided as if he wasn't certain how openly he could talk. Giuseppe's face lighted a little and he urged:

"Go on, tell us, old one. There are no others here but your friends. You know that."

"Yes, do get it off your chest, Mario," Miss Blake insisted, roguishly.

Mario grinned at her like a cross old mastiff receiving a caress, and shook his head from side to side as he said:

"Well, you see—at one time I wasn't quite so—ummh!—honest as I am now. In fact, I—well, I know almost every man in Naples who would buy stolen stuff, and certainly all of those who would buy antiques that didn't have quite a clean record!" He wasn't looking at us, so failed to perceive the grins of understanding we exchanged. "I think I could put in a few days in Naples in my own way," he continued, "and set things so that if our finds aren't already sold we could know when they were, and by what sort of a man. The same goes if they have already been sold. I had a few friends in trade who, if I told them it wasn't a police affair, might tell what we want to know."

"Naturally, if they are receivers of stolen goods, they have no fondness for

the police," I remarked. "But for that matter, I don't see how we are in a position to throw bricks at them. We don't happen at the moment to be keen on any police attention ourselves, do we?"

"Not at all! We're a lot of jolly pirates ourselves," Miss Blake cried, clapping her hands. "Why, we're almost brigands, aren't we? Isn't it fine? When I was some younger I always wished I had been a boy, so I could be a brigand. And—here I am—part of a bold, bad gang!"

I frowned upon her levity, trying to impress her with the seriousness of our plight; but I'm afraid she refused to be impressed. Instead, she remarked:

"All you say strikes me as essential. We can't fight back unless we've something to fight with. Mario has the right plan. Therefore we will go to Naples, unearthing this villain, and——"

"But—but, signorina," protested old Mario, "I didn't say that *we* should go! I said that *I*——"

"And you were right," she interrupted. "You didn't count on me at all, dear old Mario. You were brave—*uno bravo*. You would have gone alone; dared everything alone! But I—yes, I!—will share your perils. *Pericolosa!* Dangerous? I should say so. No, I shall go with you. We will unearth the men who"—she hesitated—"who swiped our swag!"

"For the love of Mike!" I cried in good Americanese, "do be serious! Stop your kidding, or the first thing you know the whole lot of us will be up against a police judge. How would it sound in the *Corriere del Napoli*: 'Millionaire's niece in police court charged with illicit excavating, and held over without bail'?"

"But that's impossible," she said, "because I could always find the bail. Guess again!"

"Well, anyhow—— See here! You don't seem to understand that——"

What was the use? She ignored me and was muttering something to that spellbound old Mario, and he was nodding, and grinning, and as pleased as if he had already discovered everything we wished to know. Giuseppe and I stood and looked at them until they found time to remember us. She jumped down off the barrel, threw away the end of the cigarette, and said:

"Well, there's no use in wasting any time over it. Mario and I start now. You two can keep on digging while we do the serious work. If you find anything while we're gone, sleep with it under your pillows, unless it's too big, in which case sit on it and watch it until we get back to tell you what to do with it. Come on, Mario. If we lose any time we can't take the next train from Pompeii, and we've got quite a long walk."

Before either Giuseppe or I could recover our senses she had passed us, looking over her shoulder and laughing; and that doddering old fool, Mario, had grinned and obediently trudged after her as she left us.

"Well," said Giuseppe, distracted, "I'll be damned!"

"So will I!" I exclaimed, having nothing better to say.

Then, troubled, and wondering what the outcome of all this might be, we fell to excavating. There was nothing else to do. It would get us nowhere to sit down and brood over our difficulties. Personally I was more worried over this last escapade of Miss Blake's than over our loss and jeopardy, for I felt that in a way Mr. Barnes had, if not exactly intrusted his niece to my care, at least expected me to look after her. If she got herself into serious publicity, it was I who would get the blame. But what could I do? She didn't care a rap for any objection I made. She was willful; did whatever she pleased. If I wired to Barnes telling him that I should appreciate it if he would peremp-

torily order her to join him, she would never forgive me—and somehow I craved her good will. Also, I didn't have Barnes' address, and would have to play rather a betrayal of confidence to get it from her.

When the third day had passed, and in the meantime Giuseppe and I had failed to find anything of value, and we had no word from our missing companions, we were both anxious, and, as far as I was interested, alarmed.

"Giuseppe, I don't like it," I remarked that evening when we stopped work.

"Neither do I," he replied. And then, as if he had understood that my concern was not over our work, but for our companions, he went on: "Mario might get himself into trouble. He's that kind of a man, or used to be. I may as well tell you something in confidence. Mario isn't quite so tame and peaceful as you might think him, or as all but a few in Naples know him to be. He has been trying to keep out of trouble for about five years now. Earned a reputation for honest, hard work, and all that.

"But—I can trust you never to repeat this to any one—Mario was for ten years about the worst brigand and outlaw that the Calabrian coast ever produced. He was the right hand of Mussoli, and was known as 'Il Pugnale' (the Dagger) because of his willingness to use it. There are three fights of his, with other bandits, one of which was in the public square, which have gone down into history. One of these men was with a rival of Mussoli's, when, after some slight dispute, they fought it out on the steps of a town mayor's *palazzo*, and Mario cut the fellow's throat.

"When Mussoli and most of his crowd were annihilated by the police, Mario was one of two or three who escaped. Of course, he, like a good many others down there, loved Mussoli.

Mussoli robbed the rich, but was lavishly generous with the poor. That was why it took so many years to finish him off; he always had friends to warn him and help him escape. Well, Mario proved patriotic, when the war broke out, and got a free pardon for bravery. He made a raid on his own to rescue an officer he liked, and not only brought back his officer, but a pocketful of Austrian ears!"

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed. "And that's the kind of a man Miss Blake's gone away with! Why didn't you tell me? Why, it's——"

"Mario likes her, and us. So she's safer with him by a whole lot than she would be if she were attended by the entire police force of Naples drawn up in a hollow square with her in the middle. You needn't be worrying about that. I'm not. What I'm worrying about is this: suppose he finds the thief, and, just for the fun of it, being prankish at times, and slightly impetuous, cuts his throat? Not that I'd mind, if he didn't get caught at it. But——"

"Come on," I said. "We'd better catch that night train for Naples. If I'd known this partner of ours wasn't quite as lamblike and gentle as I thought him, you can bet your last *soldi* he'd not have gone off on his own with my consent. And most decidedly, in any event, Miss Blake shouldn't have gone with him. We must—absolutely must!—find out what's doing."

My own forebodings stimulated Giuseppe to action; that is, if he needed any stimulation, which I surmise he didn't, because I think he, too, was becoming alarmed.

It is certain that we were a somewhat somber and silent pair when we descended from the train in Naples just as the clock bells began beating out eleven. I waited for Giuseppe to make a suggestion as to where we had best begin our search.

"He usually puts up with an old com-

padre of his who runs a lodging house near the Capuano Gate, so we'll go there first and make inquiries," he said.

And that didn't ease my mind much, because of all the sinister sections of the big Italian city, that is the worst. It is so bad that the police used to avoid it when there was any sudden excitement on, and patrol their beats in couples. In that section the denizens have a habit of settling their own disputes in a most summary and irrevocable way. Then somebody rings up the morgue.

Surrounded by the stale smell of fish from a small market that thrives in the daylight and leaves its aroma behind through the night, we plodded down the miserable, filthy streets and came to a place that didn't inspire trust. It was a noisome, fried-fish-and-macaroni restaurant underneath, and had gloomy-looking stories above it; and here and there was an iron balcony draped with soiled linen, or half-washed laundry. Alone I should have hesitated to have entered that resort in daylight; but feeling that with Giuseppe it was safer than on the dark street, followed him in.

A burly man with a scar that looked like the brand of the "Sfregio" inflicted by some jealous rival, and which disfigured his face cornerwise, and left him with half a nose, a distorted lip, a cobbled chin, and an overhung eyebrow, looked up at us as we approached the bar. Recognizing Giuseppe, he held out his hand and grinned a most horrible but possibly friendly grin. No one happened to be at our elbows, so Giuseppe lowered his voice and asked:

"Have you seen my partner, old Mario?"

"Yes, he's roosted here the last two or three nights—upstairs. But he's not here now. He was in a while ago and sat around with a young fellow who came in with him, then they barged off together. Don't know where they went."

Giuseppe looked at me in a puzzled

way and muttered: "Must be some chap he's picked up that knows something about——" He turned back to the padrone and said: "What kind of a looking young fellow was he?"

"Dirty. Slim. Looked sneaky to me—as if he were a pickpocket, or something like that. Somewhere about twenty years old. I wouldn't trust him; but Mario knows how to look out for himself."

"When Mario comes in, tell him we were here, and that we want to see him out at my place to-morrow. No, tell him to be here at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, because I want to have a talk with him."

"*Bene! Bene!*" said the padrone, and turned to serve a customer.

We went out into the street and moved irresolutely toward the empty market place, Giuseppe apparently in deep thought.

"There's one other place we might look for him," he said. "That Bene Fratelli where you met us. He might hang around there hoping to overhear talk that would be of use. But it must be that he's got on the track of something through that crook he's got with him. Some of those chaps out of the slum part of this town are like ferrets when it comes to nosing things out. I don't think he's after Mario. I think it's the other way about, and that likely it's Mario who's after him!"

Having heard Mario's past history I felt sorry for that youth. He might suffer a surprise before the companionship was ended. But if Mario had to cut a throat, I thought perhaps it had better be that of a pickpocket than any one else.

It was nearing midnight when we entered the Via Cartole, and it looked but little different than it had on the night when I invaded it, somewhat hesitantly, alone. There were the same occasional furtive ones and the same stray slatterns who muttered at us, but as we

climbed the hill everything was deserted. The black fronts of the houses on either side, the absence of life or movement, and the hollow echoes in response to our footsteps upon the worn cobbles made me question how such a nocturnal dump as the Good Brothers Café could exist through any save a lawless patronage. A veritable thieves' kitchen, I thought it, despite the fact that on my first visit there I learned that in the daytime it was frequented by ordinary laboring men. I remembered that neither Giuseppe nor Mario had enlightened me as to the type of its night patrons, so I had suspicions.

For no particular reason we had been walking without conversation as we invaded that last lap of gloom; perhaps because we had exhausted speculation and were absorbed in thought, as well as anxiety.

"There it is," Giuseppe remarked as we approached the only lighted spot in the gloom.

And even as we moved to enter, we heard a shout, a snarl, an oath-laden scream for mercy. In the very doorway we halted, peering into the semi-lighted, odoriferous interior and trying to see what was afoot.

"*Pieta della Vergine!*" a voice cried.

And then I saw, backed up against the barrels at the rear, two men, one of whom I instantly identified as the gross padrone of the place, with trembling hands uplifted. A man with stocky, broad shoulders lifted so high as to make them appear enormous, stood crouched in front of them, with his neck stiffened and his head thrust forward, and in his hand a long, wicked poniard. He did not shift his position as we entered but stood there regardless of us, a living menace to those two in front of him. Then my eyes, widely opened at this unexpected sight, shifted so that I took in another view. It was no less disconcerting.

Two other men, also with hands

above their heads and flattened against the wall as if in the extreme of terror, had their eyes fixed on the unwavering muzzle of an automatic pistol held upon them. The blue glint along its barrel was as steady as if immovably fixed, indicating that the one who held it suffered not even a palpitant nerve. He merely flicked a glance toward us; and in the profile I saw him grin, giving an instant's reflection of dazzling white teeth in contrast with his swarthy, dirty face. A cigarette stump held loosely in the corner of his mouth tightened up, he took a quick puff and blew out a tiny blue cloud of smoke that curled lazily upward toward the blackness of the rafters and the confusion of demijohns, bottles and wickered fiascos hung thereon. Now this whole picture must have been almost instantaneous in its impress upon my surprised faculties—a matter of mere seconds; for almost as we halted in the doorway I heard the menacing man at the other end of the room, back by the barrels, growl:

"I'm going through you. We can use what you've got in your pockets. And by all the saints, if you make a move, a grunt even, my blade is in your gizzards!"

There was something so deadly, so certain of fulfillment, in that hoarse threat that I found myself hoping those helpless victims up against the barrels could control their nerves. And then it dawned on me that Giuseppe and I were playing cowardly parts in the midst of a bold holdup. Well, I'm not overly brave, but I didn't think of running. I was indignant, and I didn't want to remember afterward that I had stood supinely by when a game of this sort was being carried out. So I shouted "Hold!" and lunged forward, intent upon getting inside and grappling the man nearest, that dirty-faced pickpocket with the automatic.

I came up against something that felt as rigid as a bar of iron—Giuseppe's

arm thrown across the doorway in front of me. For a single quick throw the gun in the hand of the nearest bandit wavered, and he backed like a panther for a step or two, until with that pistol he could cover not only the two cowering wretches by the wall, but us, with a threat of death. I hadn't a doubt but that he would shoot, from the way he dominated the exigency of our interference. Indeed I caught another flash of his white teeth as he smiled in amusement, or derision, at my effort.

He did not speak—not a word. Just stood there, indifferent to everything his partner was doing, intent only upon us and those two shivering men by the wall. He didn't so much as demand that we put our hands up—quite as if our interference was of no moment, but must not be permitted. I felt that he was equally indifferent, or prepared, for flight on our part; but also that he wouldn't have hesitated to stop that flight with a bullet if it best served his and his partner's escape. Once his eyes caught mine with a mocking glint, as if asking across the intervening space: "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Giuseppe! Wake up. We can't permit this, can we?" I shouted, tugging at the arm with which he barred my ingress.

To my astonishment he muttered: "Quiet! Steady! Can't you see——"

I didn't catch his concluding words, for my eyes had passed on to fix themselves on the quick actions of the man who was rapidly transferring everything from the pockets of the proprietor and the other man to his own. He concluded the plucking even as I stared, and then growled to the padrone:

"You'll keep your mouth shut or I'll come back and slit your throat. It should be done. It makes you talk too much, that fat throat of yours!"

And then he swung on his other victim. "And you," he said, "will be

equally dumb. I hunger for an excuse to slip steel into your vitals. The feeling would please me. You two stand there for five minutes, as you are, after we go!"

His companion found time to laugh, a low trickle of a laugh that sounded not only amused but gleeful. And then this man who had done the robbing quietly slid back a few steps toward us, turned just when the light fell full upon his face, and I know that my mouth hung open and my eyes bulged. For it was old Mario. I hadn't time to burble a word before he had reached us and with a grin and a wink muttered: "Come on! Out of this."

And as Giuseppe and I whirled into the darkness I saw that Mario had merely stood to one side until his pal with the pistol, with another laugh, had sprung past him. We ran down the narrow, unsavory street until we came to the Strada di Chiaia, and as we slowed down to avoid attracting the attention of any stray policeman, I somehow found time to count our numbers and saw that the stranger was still with us and wondered how far Mario intended to keep such choice company—that dirty, grimy, nerveless young ruffian whom he had doubtless picked up from the most desperate slum of this city of dreadful slums.

And then the gunman—or gun youth—suddenly thrust his hand through my arm and shook with laughter. I turned to throw him off, just as we came under the full rays of an arc lamp at a street intersection, and——

It was Miss Blake!

CHAPTER IV.

THE GREAT DISCOVERY.

FOR a moment I was incapable of speech. I stared at her closer to make certain. I couldn't convince myself that under all this grime and smear was really the face of Barnes' niece.

And then, almost horrified by the risks she had run, by this madness, I cried: "You? You? What is the meaning of this escapade? Haven't you any discretion at all?"

She laughed in my face, but did not withdraw her arm. In fact, I think she shook me back to my senses. And then suddenly she began urging me forward and cautioned me with: "*S-s-sh!* Here comes a pair of policemen. You don't want to get me pinched, do you?"

And, shivering with apprehension, I was forced to trudge past them with her at my side. But they scarcely glanced at us, possibly thinking that we were merely late workmen returning from some overtime task. We walked toward the Piazza dei Martiri, and there Mario muttered: "Wait here a moment," and dodged across to a hallway in which, under the dim light, I saw a night porter, or janitor, placidly smoking his pipe. I couldn't hear what was said, but his actions indicated that he and Mario were friends, for he got up, disappeared into his lighted room just inside the big gates, and returned with a bundle.

Mario rejoined us, and now we trudged as far as the park, where, after a glance about, he handed the bundle to Miss Blake. She took it, laughed, and fled to a deep shadow beneath one of the huge old trees. We heard the rip of the paper wrapping, and within three minutes she returned to us wearing a long, light cloak, with her face fairly cleansed beneath a modish little hat. She had even discarded her heavy shoes and donned a pair of low kids.

"I hated to have to throw away my perfectly good sponge, but it was still too soaked to carry," she remarked. "I hope some poor laborer finds that coat and the shoes I threw away. Now I can venture into the hotel. I'll make a quick change and join you just outside the door. Then we'll go and get something to eat. I'm half starved!"

I was still too much vexed to make any remarks at all. I merely took the few steps necessary to reach her hotel, and stood outside. Mario and Giuseppe had loitered behind and now and then I could hear enough to know that they were in deep conversation, and once I heard old Mario vent a growling laugh in that rough voice of his. I hesitated, turned, and was just starting toward them, when Miss Blake came gayly out. And now there was nothing at all boyish about her appearance; she had fulfilled her promise of a quick change. Without waiting for me to say anything, she commanded:

"Come on. We'll cross over to a restaurant on the island, where we can talk without being noticed."

She seemed to mark my still-smoldering vexation, for she suddenly said:

"Cheer up! Don't be so glum. If you're still afraid of——"

"Afraid of nothing! All that has worried me at any time in the last three days was what you might plunge into! Your uncle told me to look after you, and——"

"Well, you're doing it, aren't you? You're here, duly escorting me through the night dangers of *Bella Napoli*. For goodness' sake! Come out of it! Whatever's happened, it's all over now, isn't it? If you're going to act like a bear with a sore head, I'll go with Mario. He's an old dear. I love him, and we understand each other."

"But, my dear girl! What on earth have you been up to, and what made you do such a crazy thing? You're not a lunatic, are you? And that old devil Mario—for two cents I'd punch his head for letting you talk him into——"

"Good Lord! Don't!" she said. "He's still got that carving knife tucked somewhere about his person—in his boot, I think. Do you know, I doubt if our dear old Mario hasn't had some practice with that sticker, by the way in which he can bring it into action."

"But you! You—with a gun—in boy's——"

"That's not Mario's fault. That's my own automatic. Uncle gave it to me himself. In fact, if I hadn't insisted—— Why, Mario didn't want me to take it along! He's tender-hearted and was afraid I'd get excited and hurt somebody."

"Tender-hearted—hell!" I retorted. "If you knew as much about him as I've learned——" And then I stopped, remembering that Giuseppe had imposed upon me confidence which I had been on the edge of betraying.

"Oh, do tell me!" she exclaimed, getting hold of my arm again.

"I can't," I growled at her. "You get him to tell you himself, since you're so thick with him. When two persons start out to commit highway robbery together, there should be no secrets between them."

"It does look as if we're a merry lot of thieves, doesn't it? Isn't it too funny!" She gave way to laughter that was as carefree as if our whole affair from beginning to end were but a joke, a prank, with no serious issues at stake—as if there wasn't a policeman, or a law, in all of Mussoli's realm.

We got a nice empty corner in one of the delightful restaurants on that quaint old isle. After we had given the waiter an order, I stopped, looked at her expectantly, and said: "Well?" I was trying to maintain severity, which was extremely difficult, now that my mind was relieved of apprehensions and that way of hers had mollified me into good temper.

"Well," she said, "you and Giuseppe have a right to know. But I think Giuseppe has been told."

Old Mario relaxed into a grin.

"So I'll tell you in English," she went on. "Less chance of some one understanding, anyway, if there should be any listeners out of sight. What happened was just this:

"When we came to Naples, I thought it would be an interesting opportunity for me to see a side of its life that one doesn't get much of a chance of knowing. But Mario wanted to go alone; said he couldn't take any woman with him, because the people he wanted to visit might grow suspicious. Also that he might go to certain places at times when it wouldn't be safe for a signorina.

"So I settled all that by buying boy's clothes on the first day he was out. I've ridden enough, and mountaineered enough, and ranches enough, and all that, so that I feel at home in breeches if any one can. Besides, my voice is pretty deep, you know, for a woman. I got Mario to admit that I could look like a pretty tough young fellow, though it took a mighty lot of persuasion to induce him to let me accompany him. But he's a good old sport, and finally gave in.

"So then for two days—or I should say nights, because he seems to know a lot of people who prefer to do business after dusk—we found where the stuff stolen from us had been sold, and who sold it. By the way, this firm owes me about twenty dollars' worth of lire that we had to bribe that rascally fence with! He wouldn't tell us until we'd oiled him.

"Well, Mario said he knew the man, and that it was—as he had thought—one of those fellows who was in that dirty little café on the night you three talked. So Mario thought he'd better go up there alone to see to it; but I wanted to see what happened, and just at the last moment I remembered that automatic and had a brain wave that if things got rough it might come in handy. Mario didn't take me up there. I found the place myself. Got there just in time, too!"

Mario, who had been catching a word now and then, nodded his head and then spoke to me in his rapid, harsh Italian.

"I saw the thief I was after talking to that crooked padrone, and then knew they were partners. It was the padrone who put him onto us; they must have divided the twenty thousand lire they sold our stuff for. When I jumped toward them they guessed what was coming. But it seemed the others in that Bene Fratelli, instead of bolting out as I had expected, picked up stools and were going to take a hand. Then—*sitti!* There is the signorina in the door with a pistol." He paused to vent that hoarse chuckle of his. "Cool she was. Without her—who knows? Probably I'd have had to cut my way out—if I had got out at all. So after that I just emptied the pockets of those two; because of course what they had belonged to us. Then I threw fear into them. *Per Bacco!* I doubt if they'll interfere with us again. Here's the money I got."

He fished into his pocket and brought out some wadded bills, two watches, a pocketknife, a scarf pin, and a handful of coins. Evidently he had done his work thoroughly. He thrust the entire loot over to Miss Blake to count, and then and there I knew whom he had elected head of our company. Miss Blake rapidly counted it with her slender, deft fingers, her lips silently moving; and then she leaned back and came as near giggling as I ever heard her.

"Twenty-one thousand four hundred and thirty-two lire!" she exclaimed. "So we collected cash interest as well as this other plunder. I didn't do so badly in my first holdup, after all, did I? I'd like that big brass watch for my share."

"I've understood that the chief of a gang of brigands always takes his pick," I remarked.

And Mario growled: "True, signore, true. That is my personal experience also." And whether the old ruffian surmised that Giuseppe had told me about him, I don't know; but in any event he

didn't seem to care a rap as he sat there grinning fondly at his fellow bandit, and now and then wagging his grizzled, scarred old head in admiration.

And when we separated for the night I foresaw that our camp was a divided one and that in the event of any disagreement arising as to means or procedure, Giuseppe and I would find ourselves against an inseparable pair of confederates. Indeed, on the following day, when, following our custom, we returned to the house in the vineyard in two separate parties, Mario promptly declared that he would go by rail with Miss Blake, so Giuseppe and I took the boat. Giuseppe confided to me, in the short voyage, his fears.

"That old bandit can't be depended upon by us any more," he said dryly. "After you left us last night he couldn't talk of anything else but this girl's coolness and bravery, and it's my opinion that she can put him up to anything and he'll try to get away with it. I tell you from this on that he's her slave! I wish to the Madonna that she'd clear out. She's dangerous. No one can tell what she'll do."

"I, too, wish she would go back to a hotel and stay there," I agreed, but with the mental reservation that the hotel shouldn't be too far distant for me to visit her frequently—say two or three times a day. There wasn't a chance on earth, of course, for me to ever be anything more to her than a friend; but I was compelled to admit to myself that I liked her better than any woman I had ever met, and that when this affair was concluded, and she went back into her world, so vastly separated from mine, there would come a mighty big gap in my life.

Foreseeing this, and to spare myself too fervid pangs in the future, I was tempted, and considered, throwing up my share of the enterprise then and there. Then it occurred to me that my defection wouldn't help matters. All

that could happen would be that she would step into my shoes, finance the work, and probably get herself into a bigger mess of trouble than if I were there to try, at least, to keep some sense in her head, and possibly protect her from her own and Mario's follies. It was all right for him to have announced reformation, to have lived strictly up to it for some years, and have become a horny-handed son of toil; but the previous night's episode convinced me that at heart he was still a bandit, with an equal contempt for law or life. I was glad that in his way he liked me, because I'd rather have run foul of a Bengal tiger than that old man with his dirk. So in the end I had to reconcile myself to the situation, but with many misgivings.

Before the others arrived, Giuseppe and I put on the door an American lock that we felt should baffle almost any thief on earth. When our companions came they brought a donkey load of edible luxuries. Inwardly I groaned; that meant that Miss Blake had come to stay some time. This latest touch of adventure had apparently rendered her more avid. Also she brought a banjo, and if anything was required to complete Mario's total subjugation, that instrument and her admittedly fine and deep contralto did it. Why, at night, after we had supped and she picked that barbaric thing and sang soft Italian love songs, I've seen that murderous old rufian in tears! As far as he was concerned, there was nothing that she could do around that show that wasn't superlatively right, and his "*Benissimo! Benissimo! Cara ange!*" became more frequent. It made up most of his conversation.

And work? We worked ourselves to death, probably for individual reasons—Giuseppe and I because we endured apprehensions that Il Pugnale's victims might recover from their fright and plot some form of revenge, Mario

because of his doglike adoration for Miss Blake, and she through sheer joy of doing something illegal, surreptitious, different from any of the numerous other adventures of her life. She was never too tired to be gay. She laughed at Giuseppe's and my fears, and tried now and then to get a rise out of old Mario, but never evoked anything from him but a grin of enjoyment.

And then we found the Sleeping Hercules. There's not much use in describing it, for it is of world-wide renown now. Perhaps it is the finest piece of bronze ever found in either Herculaneum or Pompeii—that magnificent thewed figure with its attitude of weariness and profound repose after fabulous labors, the huge bludgeon fallen from the tired hands, the hair disordered and the lips parted. Sleep—sleep in bronze.

We found it in a small room that I am inclined to believe had been especially set aside for it. There was nothing else in that room save the statue resting on a huge granite pedestal, quite as if its long-dead owner had appreciated its beauty and would not detract from it by surrounding it with less-wonderful objects. It took the united strength of Mario and me to lift it from the pedestal and carry it up the incline. We were too overcome with admiration—something akin to awe!—to rejoice verbally as we had done when unearthing lesser things. Even the irrepressible Miss Blake took the discovery seriously, and when we had cleaned it and stood back to admire it, there in the semilight of the old wine shed, I saw her hands involuntarily clasp themselves together with delight.

"Beautiful! How beautiful!" she said, very quietly.

"Never have I seen its equal," I agreed, "anywhere. It is peerless."

"She's one damn good piece bronze," Giuseppe remarked in English.

But old Mario looked entirely un-

moved—whether from lack of artistic appreciation, or because he was thinking of its value, I didn't try to determine. And then it dawned on all of us that, inasmuch as we had found this masterpiece in this private excavation of ours, there must be others of equal or near value buried there in the earth, and our elation was boundless.

It required nearly five days for us to prove that the Sleeping Hercules was the sole adornment of that room; and great was our disappointment. But we began work on a second chamber, and now, despite our efforts to stow the earth removed, found ourselves badly impeded. Giuseppe at last reluctantly declared we must cease actual exploration and drive the short tunnel necessary to reach the cellar beneath the main residence. And so that was begun. Miss Blake took advantage of the lapse to visit Naples, and we hadn't realized until then how much of a part she had become of our company. I was frankly lonesome, Mario was almost sullen, and even Giuseppe remarked that the food wasn't fit to eat, the work was dragging, and the evenings without amusement.

It was on the third evening, just after we had driven our tunnel through, that Miss Blake brought us another surprise. We were throwing together food for our supper when we heard a cheerful hail outside and turned to greet her, all of us glad for her return, when we saw that she was not alone. Then another voice broke in with a deep, "Good evening, everybody. How are you, Hall?" and we recognized Mr. Barnes.

He held his hand out to me and, as I took it, went on, "Curly wrote me that you had found some sort of a marvel—or at least she thinks so! Of course she knows but little about antiques. But she insisted so earnestly that I drop my business there in Paris and come at once that—well, here I am."

At first I felt something of annoyance at this action she had taken with-

out consulting the others of us, but then appreciated that perhaps this was the very best thing that could have happened.

"Mr. Barnes, it is good," I said with conviction. "I am no expert, but it's my sincere opinion that we have found one of the finest, if not the very finest, bronze Hercules that has ever been unearthed."

He had been careless and somewhat whimsical up to that moment, as if visiting us merely in obedience to the whim of his favored niece, but now he became serious and exclaimed: "Is that so! Really? I must see it. Is it too late?"

"I really prefer that you look at it in daylight," I said. "Furthermore, we have got it back underground, because ——" I stopped, wondering if his niece had told him of our previous loss, glanced at her, caught a warning frown, and concluded lamely: "Because we run no risks with it."

I wondered if he knew that she had been camping there with us, working with us, but his next words showed that in this regard she had not failed in confession.

"What would you do with a niece like mine?" he demanded, with a grin. "When she calmly informed me that she had moved out here to watch the work, I was astonished. Nothing but the fact that you were here to act as guardian for her prevented me from peremptorily ordering her to join me. That young woman has her own way. She bosses me around as if I were her lackey, and the deuce of it is, I like it!"

"She seems more or less to have assumed the same position with us," I said. "But, unconventional as it all seems, we happen to be in the same boat as yourself, sir: we like it."

That fine old man had as many facets as a diamond. It is of no importance or worth to me that some have called him ruthless, hard, domineering. I knew him only as I saw him, with, per-

haps, his softer side, his human side, freely exposed. And he was human. He laughed as if this break of conventional laws was of no moment whatever.

"I trust her," he said, and he said it in a way that convinced me that he made no reservations. "Now, since you think it better for me to have this private view in daylight, can you put me up somehow for the night? Of course, after we eat something."

"Eat what we have? Put you up for the night?" I stammered. "Why, you couldn't endure our fare, or——"

"Can't I?" he asked, with dry humor. "I was sleeping with one blanket and living on scant food from a prospector's pack before you were born, young fellow."

And so, knowing that argument was futile with such a man, we treated him as he wished. He shared our crude meal; and I got the best of him in but one particular—he slept in my bed while I rolled myself comfortably into spare blankets on the floor. Furthermore there was nothing of the plutocrat in the man who, after we had dined, sat with us, listened to the picking of that banjo, and joined in the chorus of songs that Miss Blake seemed to know were favorites of his. I know a few old frontier songs myself, picked up from the hoarse voices of old men who had been cow-punchers or miners in days now dead; and when I essayed a few chords on the strings and sang them to him—and I have no voice—his enthusiasm knew no limit.

In fact, after all the others had gone and we were alone he began to catechise me as to my life; asked shrewd questions; made sane comments; and pointed out in a kindly way where I had blundered. He seemed to respect me for my honest failures but to pity my lack of—what shall I call it?—"grabativeness" in situations in which he wouldn't have failed. I felt pitifully young and inexperienced that night, as if he had turned

me inside out, before I finally went to sleep there on the floor with the blankets wrapped round me.

He was the first one up in the morning, and apparently enjoyed hustling us out with his, "Shake a leg! Get up and hear the birdies sing, you loafers!"—a combination of sea and cowboy slang.

Not until we had breakfasted and had a smoke did he suggest visiting the wine house. Mr. Barnes stood at the head of the incline while Mario and Giuseppe brought from its hiding place our prize. Then suddenly he dropped his half-consumed cigar and stared at the Hercules while we stood proudly to one side. That fine piece of bronze had affected me. I was gratified when I saw his start and astonishment. He walked completely around it, scrutinized it, and then turned toward Miss Blake, who was watching him as if anticipating his delight.

"Curly," he said, "you were right! It's the finest thing of its kind ever found! It's—it's magnificent! Incomparable!"

As a proof that he was a man who came to instantaneous decisions, he whirled toward me and said: "Hall, I've got to have that! I'm going to leave it to you to get it out of Italy. You're young and must have resource. But, hold on! You're not alone in this find, are you? I'll give—I'll give—a hundred thousand dollars for it delivered anywhere across the Italian frontiers. You can tell the others that."

But I had heard a gasp from behind me, and turned to Giuseppe, who had understood and had staggered back against an empty barrel. Mario stood blinking from one to another of us, and now Giuseppe recovered sufficiently to explain this offer. Mario appeared the least interested of any of us.

"Bene!" he said. "Good! For that sum we'll deliver it across the frontiers of hell—if we have to carry the thing that far. Eh?"

"*Va bene!*" Giuseppe replied. He looked at me, and I nodded my approval.

The offer was so huge that I myself had a jolt; and I glanced across at Miss Blake, to discover that she was regarding me with a smile whose meaning I couldn't quite gather. Whether she was glad that her uncle had taken such a violent desire for the antique, or whether she was gloating over the fact that she had done more for our little combination than I, unaided, could have dreamed of accomplishing puzzled me. But there the offer was, and the method of earning it required much consideration.

"Well, what do you think of it, Hall?" Mr. Barnes asked. "Have you any idea how it can be done?" And I knew then that he wasn't thinking so much of the bargain as of getting possession of the Sleeping Hercules.

"Yes, there must be some way of working it," I agreed. "We must plan that out. Also I'm convinced that it would be wise for us to first close up the work we've done thus far—for the time being, at least, until we get the other matter off our hands."

And Giuseppe, who had been intently listening, nodded his head in assent.

"Well, decide how you're going to attempt it and—— Let me see! Ummh! I shall be in Naples at the hotel for three days, then must return to Paris. When you're ready to shoot, come to the hotel and tell me what you propose. And you, Curly," he said, addressing his niece, "now that you've lost your job here, are you coming back with me?"

"Oh, I can't get away until to-morrow," she said. "Besides, it's more than probable that my advice will be required."

Her uncle laughed at her air of self-assurance and said: "As you will. But I think you'd best walk with me as far as Castellammare, eh?"

"Yes, you might get hopelessly lost without me to look after you," she replied.

And a few minutes later they left me alone with Giuseppe and Mario.

CHAPTER V.

A DANGEROUS PLAN.

IT was in an excited silence that we three men went to the wine house to conceal our work. We rolled the old empty barrels down into the mouth of the excavation and piled them up as a barricade, then fell to with shovels and the wheelbarrow to cover these over with earth. I think that each of us was mentally planning, or striving to formulate some plan, as we worked with unheeded sweat streaming from us in that place, which was anything but cool on a hot summer's forenoon.

I remember that I was considering what letters I should write to those whom I had approached on the subject of my previous enterprise; for it was plain that if we could succeed in our *coup* it would mean that I should have funds with which to work more leisurely, and with more peace of mind and assurance. Furthermore, I now felt under obligations to assist Giuseppe and Mario to the very end; for they had trusted me and looked to me for guidance. To them success meant fortune, their ideas of wealth being based on a saner conception than mine.

But I will admit that now, when I was confronted with a task of this magnitude, where I must run counter to the law, it no longer seemed so easy. To smuggle out a few smaller objects, which was all that I had ever dreamed of when entering into the original compact, was a vastly different matter from handling a bulky bronze statue requiring the strength of two men to lift. The Sleeping Hercules was four feet and eight inches in length, and nearly three feet in width. There was no possible

way of reducing this measurement, for it was a single hollow casting. It couldn't, therefore, be shipped by freight, or express, owing to the constant examinations which would inevitably be made, even though it were boxed.

Its very shape made it an awkward thing to handle, and would arouse curiosity and subsequent inspection. And inspection, in Italy, where there are so many separate communal taxations and customs, has been elevated to a fine art. There is scarcely a city of any prominence that hasn't its outposts for the assessment of everything from farm produce to manufactured products. Then would come the frontier itself, where it is almost impossible to find even a mountain path that hasn't its guardian. And the worst of the guards were, from my own experience, incorruptible.

That evening we held a long and sometimes spirited conference, in which Miss Blake, with her customary lack of reverence for her seniors, and also forgetful of the fact that she had no particle of ownership in the bronze, proceeded to demolish most of our suggestions. My personal idea was that if we could find and bribe the owner of one of the numerous little steam trawlers that work from the Gulf of Naples as far as north Africa it would be comparatively easy to slip the bronze out on some dark night in a rowboat, meet the trawler well offshore, and then land it in Tunis. Giuseppe would have carted it completely across to some small port near Brindisi, and slipped it thence to a Greek port; but there his plan was halted by the calm statement of Miss Blake that Greece had become nearly as rigorous in its preservation and possession of objects of art as Italy.

All this time old Mario sat there, lighting one cigarette from another, and nothing but the flicker of his eyes as they shifted from one speaker to an-

other indicated that he was listening. It seemed to annoy Giuseppe, who was plainly coming to the end of his resources, for he suddenly stared at Mario and growled:

"Well, old bandit, you should know something of smuggling, if any one does. Can't you suggest something?"

"*Si, si, si!* I know smuggling," Mario growled, with a grin that was full of reminiscence. "But not in this country. So I have let you chatter like sparrows." He clicked his fingers with disdain for our helplessness. "*Si*, there is one place—just one—far up toward the Dolomite that I know where, with brave luck, we might get across. Just that one! I know it because not only did I once steal two ibex kids from the king's own preserves and carry them across there, but because in the war I fought there. I know one section of those mountains—every path and every peak of it. If we could but get there we——"

Miss Blake suddenly clapped her hands and said: "Bravo! Why not?"

"But consider the hundreds and hundreds of kilometers—almost the entire length of Italy!" Giuseppe cried, staring widely into space, as if thinking of such a journey. To him New York seemed easier of access than did northern Italy.

And I, meditating, also thought of those hundreds of miles and returned to my own project of trying to carry our prize away by sea.

We were no farther advanced when, on the following day, Miss Blake, Giuseppe, and I went to Naples, leaving Mario on guard; for now that the bronze assumed the magnitude of a prospective hundred thousand dollars, we feared for its safety. And in Naples Giuseppe and I, going alone to make our quiet inquiries, met blank disappointment. There was not only the impossibility of finding any steam vessel that would run the risk, but a ques-

tion whether we could land our antique in Tunis, and, if we did, whether we could get it out. I was convinced we could overcome the latter two risks; but to try to run to Tunis at that season of the year in a sailboat—provided one could be found—and en route evade the fast Italian customs boats with which those waters are infested, was palpably a last resort.

It was in this mood that, late in the afternoon, I called at Mr. Barnes' hotel and was ushered up to his room. His niece was there, perched on the arm of a couch.

"Well," said Mr. Barnes, "I can see by your face that you've had no success. Curly has told me the plan you favor, and I'm not for it. I tell you frankly, that the northern route, that old pirate Mario's scheme, sounds to me the most promising. Now, you may think I'm horning in on your preserves, but make no mistake about my wanting that bronze. Why, I'm so set on having it that if I were younger, I'd try to take it out myself. It's not only that I want it for itself; but the matter is a grudge with me! If I could fool this government, I'd——"

He got up from his seat, walked across to the open doors leading out to a balcony, and stared over the placid blue waters of that wonderful bay. Capri, pale purple, loomed as a thing of exquisite, ethereal fineness off in the distance; but he did not seem to observe it, although his eyes were fixed in that direction. He turned sharply and said:

"Look here, Hall, maybe it's the expense you are troubled about. Has that anything to do with it?"

"Candidly, it has," I admitted. "It means buying cars, avoiding regular routes leading through large cities, and even——"

"I'll raise my original offer," he said, interrupting me as if impatient at being balked in any endeavor. "I'll give you twenty thousand dollars from which

to pay expenses, and if there's any of it left, you can refund it. Would that be enough?"

"Of course," I replied. "But we couldn't take that unless it is thoroughly understood that there's not anywhere near an even break for us to succeed."

"Understood! I know all that. I'm willing to take the gamble. And you're not the man I've thought you to be for more than fifteen years, if you funk it. Why, when I think of what you've been through, the adventures I know you've had, I'm surprised at your hesitancy."

"I got tired of being shot at a long time ago," I said, and meant it.

"But those two Italians can't carry it through without you," he insisted.

"No, perhaps not," I answered, twisted with indecision. The offer was more than tempting to one low in funds, and yet I could foresee a hundred dangers, with all the odds against us.

I was not aware that Miss Blake had arisen until her shadow came between me and the door. She was smiling down at me, and holding out her hand.

"Why not say yes?" she asked. "If you don't, I swear to you I'll try to carry that bronze away myself, with none but Mario and Giuseppe to help me." And despite that smile of hers, I knew that she was in hard earnest and would do just as she asserted.

It was that which influenced me more than anything else. There was no earthly means of surmising how far her reckless bravery might carry her, into what foolish blind alleys. Almost in a panic of apprehension I appealed to her uncle.

"You wouldn't let her do that, would you, Mr. Barnes? Why, it's impossible!"

"I don't know. In fact, I've never yet been able to stop her from doing anything she dared, although I'll say that up to now she's never done much to which I've made any very strenuous objection."

"But, Miss Blake! You don't really mean that, do you?" I asked her.

"I was never more in earnest," she declared. "I believe I'd love the adventure. And neither Mario nor Giuseppe would let anything happen to me."

"All right! That settles it," I exclaimed, rising. "I like you too well to let you take risks that you haven't even a most cursory knowledge of. It can't be done; it's lunacy!" Then I faced Mr. Barnes and said: "All right, sir. I accept your offer. And I'll do my best."

He made no comment, but strode to the writing table in the room, and sat down and wrote out his check.

"If you think you are likely to have any difficulty in getting that cashed," he said, "I can arrange it for you in the morning. Perhaps that is the better way. Yes, I'll come out to your place and bring you Italian currency tomorrow forenoon. Curly will want to come out and get her things, too, I suppose, as I understand she intends going to Florence."

I looked at her, and she nodded her head; and somehow, now that all this little period of work and intimacy with its savor of adventure had been closed like a finished book, I found myself regretting its end. It could never come again. I hadn't appreciated until that moment how much of happiness we had enjoyed out there in that isolated, rambling old house in the midst of the vineyard. I thought of the lazy, contented singing in the dusk when the day was done; of the good humor that had possessed us all—even including that grim old man of the dagger, Mario. And when I parted from them and went to meet Giuseppe, it was with a heavy heart.

"Nothing doing," he remarked, at sight of my face.

"On the contrary," I said. "Everything!"

And on the way home—for I couldn't but feel that it was that, although we were so soon to leave it—I told him of Mr. Barnes' proffer; and he was far more elated than I, doubtless because his mind was fixed on nothing save prospective fortune.

I was to be jolted again the next day, when, in accordance with his promise, Mr. Barnes appeared and turned over to me twenty thousand dollars' worth of lire in large denominations, and before I had counted them Miss Blake came out carrying her suit case and the banjo.

"Well," she said cheerfully, "I'm off. It's come to the good-by." She dropped the two on the floor, and suddenly lost her air of gayety, as she said: "But I hate to go. I've been so——"

Both Mario and Giuseppe were reaching for her belongings, but old Mario was snarling like a dog being robbed of a bone, and won both.

"Here's a telegraph address that will always reach me." Mr. Barnes was talking regardless of distraction. "Don't hesitate to call on me for more money or help, if I can be of any use. I want that bronze, and I'm depending on you to get it out for me. And when I depend on a man for anything I expect him to make good. No need for all of you to come tagging after us down to the foot of the path. Got a car waiting down there. Come on, Curly!"

It was not until Giuseppe and I had waved them good-by from the doorway, and seen them pass from sight, that I recalled that I had not asked for Miss Blake's address. I started to run after them, then checked myself. What grounds had I for asking such a thing? And also, if she had wanted me to have her address, or to correspond with me, would she have left in this definite way? No, it was merely a brief adventure for her, something bizarre and amusing, to be speedily forgotten as she sought others more in keeping with her exalted

station in life—far removed from any orbit of mine. Somehow this difference and divergence measured peculiarly bitter to me in that minute of surprising desolation. The sentiment was unexpected, too, because until the final parting I hadn't fully appreciated an unmerited happiness. Mario came trudging back, and there was that in his face that made me feel that he, too—this strange, murderous, morally warped old ruffian—would miss her.

"Now," he said, as if to leave sentiment behind, "we must make our plans and move. The place I want to get to is Val Demitrino near Undine. It will be for Robert"—as he always called me—"to get us there, for I don't know the way. After that, I can be of use. Now, Signore Roberto, what shall I do next?"

That afternoon I packed my own belongings and made my departure. I went down to take a look at the bronze which had altered all my plans, and, although I didn't know it, was to play such an important part in my life and become for me one of its most tragic anxieties. There is an old Arab proverb which says: "It is well for the wanderer 'neath the sun that he knoweth not what the night bringeth," for, if that were our gift, what trying enterprises would most of us at some time or another abandon.

I told my partners how I wanted the great antique packed and boxed, and took what I did not then know was to be my last look around the wine house where we had labored. With its gaping excavation filled in, leveled, and beaten to smoothness, there was nothing to betray to the casual eye what slumbered beneath: that hidden villa with who knows what stores of lost wealth? But the big space, considerably enlarged by the removal of the tiers of old barrels, seemed spiritually rather than physically empty, now that the young woman who had enlivened it with whimsical jests, gay remarks, and badinage was gone.

Gone, too, was a lot of the glamour of mystery, the avidity of hopes, the stark uncertainty. True, we three men had first come there on a strange quest, and had been rewarded far beyond our most sanguine desires; but I felt that we had lost something which couldn't be recovered, and that in the words of that almost-forgotten genius, Ingalls, we "should not pass that way again."

I think I must have been in a strange, melancholy mood that afternoon, when, alone, I tramped to and fro on the little steamer bound from Castellammare to Napoli. Doubtless the few other passengers discerned nothing strange, interesting, or suggesting adventure, in the lean-faced, gray-eyed, somewhat-too-broad-shouldered man with streaks of premature gray in the brown hair about his temples. I saw none of them, and possibly none of them saw me. So we were quits. From the minute I stepped foot on the worn stones of the quay in Naples I couldn't have known any of them by sight again, so oblivious had I been to their presence on the boat.

Mr. Barnes and his niece stopped at a hotel which was far beyond any means of mine, and as there was no reason, or pretext, for my calling upon them again, I was in for a lonely interim. I dined alone, and walked out alone; for to one who is accustomed to open surroundings, walls of any kind are loathsome.

It was not later than ten o'clock when, trudging from the park, the Comunale, along the Strada di Chiaia, and with the Gambrinus Café as my objective, I came to the mouth of the sordid side street leading to the Bene Fratelli, hesitated, and impelled by curiosity, turned off into it and climbed upward. At this hour of the evening I discerned that the noisome street was more thickly populated. There was a street life—a life of the cobblestones—which I hadn't seen. Groups loitered and talked. Children in all degrees of dirtiness

played their games upon the pavement. Old women gossiped with vocal screams and fervid gestures. Flower venders hoping to dispose of their dying wares wandered and bargained and sold—at any price! It was life, all that! Desperate sales in final resorts to the highest bidder.

I entered the Good Brothers Café with some hesitancy, questioning if its proprietor might not identify me as being one of those who had upset his treacherous deal. But I might have spared all that, for his place was filled and he was busy behind his unkempt bar, while a slatternly old woman with half-blinded eyes and straggling hair whom I had not hitherto seen rushed here and there serving drinks. I suspected that the glass she served me had not been cleansed since its last usage, and quietly emptied it under my stool.

I was more interested in the place than in what it purveyed. I had taken a seat at the side, opposite one who was sodden; but now when my eyes accustomed themselves to the light, I looked about me, and I saw back in the most obscure corner three men talking excitedly, gesticulating, holding their heads close together. I might not have paid special scrutiny to the group, had not that fat-necked, obese padrone rushed across whenever his business permitted and joined in their conversation. Once he became so interested that he neglected all the demands of his customers, waved the insistent old hag away, and took his own time to finish his contribution to the low-voiced talk, before returning to his post to draw wine, produce fiascos, fill pitchers, and extract soldi.

Soon one of the men at the corner table dropped his cigarette to the filth of the floor, bent down to recover it, and turned so that the full light of the sole lamp in the Bene Fratelli fell full upon his face. For one brief instant I thought his eyes met mine, and then he

turned back to the others. I was relieved, because he was the rat-faced man whom I had last seen standing beside the proprietor of that unsavory dump, with hands upraised while Mario, clutching his murderous dagger, held them in submission until he had robbed them of twenty-odd thousand lire—twenty thousand of which they had previously stolen from us.

For a full five minutes I sat regarding them, and thinking. They were excited, voluble, even violent about something. But about what? I would have given much to overhear, but their pitch and position were such that it was impossible. All I could overhear was that it was something concerning money, for at last the padrone, as if overcome by argument, said in a louder tone:

"Bene! Bene! I take my ticket in the Banco Lotto—for up to fifteen thousand lire. No more! That gone, I quit!"

Then the others with Italian fervor reached up to pat his arms, his fat shoulders, his unwholesome back. In chorus they told him that he couldn't lose; that he was a prince of good fellows, a true sport. And he, as if thoughtfully repentant for something that he had been led to promise, again waddled back to his bar to catch up with neglected demands.

But I had heard enough to cause me wonder. The Banco Lotto? Surely no man in his right senses, though he be a millionaire, would risk fifteen thousand lire in that lottery! Fifteen thousand lire meant a thousand dollars of the coin of my country, and the lowest sweep in Naples could prove to one that the chances against an investment in the Banco Lotto were something like seven hundred to one. The padrone of the Good Brothers wasn't the sort of man to take that chance with more than a lira (three pence) invested. His lire didn't come fast enough to gamble more.

I was pondering all this when, lifting my eyes from the filthy table between that sodden one and me, I saw the rat face of that padrone's friend turned toward me. There was a question in his stare. His black eyes glittered when the light fell on them. There was that in his regard that warned me that he was trying to couple up lost memories, trying to bring something back.

The room was queerly filled with dangers in that moment. I pretended to have lost something on the sawdust floor, bent beneath the table, searched, straightened up, arose, and taking care to avert my face, went to the bar, paid my reckoning, and walked out. What a fool I had been, thought I, as I hastened out of that dangerous street, to let mere curiosity lead me to the Bene Fratelli. But on the other hand there was no evident reason why any one in the café could associate either Giuseppe or me with that holdup. I breathed easier, however, when I had joined the stream of pedestrians in the still-crowded Strada di Chiaia and made my way to the hotel, where I speedily forgot all else in considering my plans.

On the following morning I bought a worn but serviceable lorry from a reputable secondhand dealer. He had a better one for but little more money, but I was influenced in my choice by the fact that the lorry I selected had a Rome license number. The purchase of the lorry was easy in comparison with procuring a driver's license. I knew the ropes sufficiently to go to a school for driving, where I produced not only an Egyptian license as proof of my ability to drive, but a nice fat note which I privately dangled before the eyes of the padrone and explained that it was his if he could hasten matters up. He did. He had one of the inevitable "cousins" in the city department issuing such permits. Between running here and there, and getting photographs taken, it took us more than seven hours to procure

that necessary document; but armed with it, I didn't regret the time, trouble, or money.

The market gardeners with their laden donkeys, or creaking carts, were coming into the city when, early on the following morning, I drove my lorry out along the shore road toward Giuseppe's place. I had decided overnight that boldness was a better course than any other, and that to go out there in broad daylight would prove safer than to make a nocturnal visit. I got to the house at noon, and after we had lunched we boldly carried the bronze in its case down to the lorry, and then piled furniture and household goods over the case, to completely mask it.

Our idea was to drive to and through Rome. That Roman license was adequate excuse. I could tell the tale to any one who inspected us that I had taken one load to Naples and had got a chance to bring Giuseppe's furniture back to help pay expenses. Giuseppe would be there to explain that he had got a job in Rome and was merely making a very natural move of his goods by cheap transport. Then from Rome northward we could reverse the excuse, naming some other city as a destination from which I was to return to Rome with another shipment.

There is something about the stretching ahead of roads that, to one born a wanderer, has fascination. And there is also something to say for a gypsy life, with its wayside encampments and utter freedom. So as we rattled along over the roads leading northward, our spirits rose and, save at times when I fell to thinking of Miss Blake, all of us were happy. When we had to run out to let something pass us, throwing its clouds of dust, we laughed at their haste. When, occasionally, we didn't hear the insistent hooting of their horns speedily enough to please them, and they on passing shook their fists and execrated us, we shook our fists and howled back.

Now and then we three, sitting on the broad, rocking, high seat, sang to the clattering accompaniment of our progress; and even old Mario relaxed and seemed happy to be on the roads again. The wanderlust in him had revived.

"When I get my share of our fortune," he once said, after a long silence, "I shall go to the Argentine. Four times I have started to see that strange land and each time something has prevented."

"What, for instance?" I asked.

He answered in one word, uttered with a grin: "Police!"

After a moment he heaved a sigh and said: "It will be long before I see my native Calabria again!" And he spoke truth.

I grew to like that old villain tremendously. There was something so admirable in his ruggedness, his steadfastness, his philosophic acceptance of discomforts. I never knew that man to utter one single word of complaint, and that's not a bad record to recall. Of course he was murderous; but in my time I've known some lovable and admirable murderers, and of all, Mario was the best.

CHAPTER VI.

A PICTURESQUE ALLY.

THAT long, long trip is now but a blur of confused memories of things either vexatious or inconsequential, and it is strange how the mind registers. For instance, I recall the license number of a motor cycle that passed us just outside of Rome—recall it for no reason on earth save that it was from Naples. Then there was the breakdown of the lorry just as we entered Perugia, and the bargaining with a secondhand dealer for the almost-new and highly lurid light van of a company that had failed. The legend on its sides, translated, read, in great yellow letters: "The Perugia Dyeing & Cleaning Company."

Remembered also is my annoyance when, after we camped outside Florence, Mario insisted on accompanying me into the beautiful old town. I stood in need of some underlinen replenishment, which afforded me an excuse; but secretly I had determined to call at some of the leading hotels in hope of again meeting Miss Blake. Mario, who claimed to know the town, succeeded in losing himself while I was in an outfitter's shop, and, imagining all sorts of contretemps, I put in a fretful hour waiting for him to find his way back. My secret annoyance made me eloquent, which provoked only an apologetic grin.

And after Florence began the annoying inquisitiveness of country and village policemen who couldn't understand why a Perugia van should be so many hundred miles from its home town. It seemed that there had been a gang of motor thieves at work in both Perugia and Florence and all cars from those places had to account for themselves.

In Padua we overcame our conspicuousness by having the van made over into a makeshift caravan and painted a sober black. We chafed at the week's delay, but the wagon maker took his time. Doubtless he wondered why we wanted such a huge and strong locker built, in addition to two berths; but when we left Padua the bronze rode securely hidden, and locked. And thereafter I posed as a wandering geologist, intent on studying dolomite formations, with Giuseppe and Mario as helpers. Without further event we slipped through Treviso and came to Udine, rendered almost careless by monotony, although keyed up by the thought that we neared the scene which must be the climax of our strange adventure. Mario was now on familiar ground and had become our guide. It was he who directed us to the garage where, although at the time we did not appreciate it, it is possible we were fortunate in finding a lockup.

"There used to be a quiet little inn here where we could put up for the night," Mario said, as I climbed out of the van and closed and locked the steel screen. "It was run by a friend of mine and I'd like to see him," he added, with a look which made me wonder if there wasn't something ulterior in his words. Some trivial thing delayed me a moment, and my mind was idle and lazy when I started to rejoin my companions out in front. As I sauntered along, glad that another day's driving was over with, my eyes fell on a short row of motor cycles, and I remember that I was thinking that they furnished the ideal method of transportation for the narrow roads of those hilly countries when I blinked and stopped. There before me stood one with a familiar Naples license.

For a moment I stood puzzled, before I could recall where I had seen that number before, and then Rome, now so many hundred miles behind, came to memory.

"That chap," thought I, "is taking a mighty long trip on his machine. Strange, too, that we should have come over the same route." Then the coincidence lost its momentary interest and I dismissed the matter from mind.

We went to the modest little *albergo*, which stood in an obscure old street, and more, with a dry interchange of not too many words, Mario and his old friend, also a Calabrian, shook hands, and we were made welcome.

Seldom have I seen such a man as that padrone, whom Mario addressed as "Gigi," the Italian diminutive for "Luigi." He towered over his bar like a colossus, and I thought that he must be standing on a raised platform behind it, until he came out to the end. Everything about him was enormous save his head, which, perhaps because of the breadth of his shoulders, seemed disproportionately small. He had a chest like a barrel, the hands and arms of a

gorilla, and stood upon legs that would have made a professional weight-lifter envious. Moreover, his great bulk seemed not to render him clumsy. His face, like that of most giants, was good-natured. Indeed he looked like an overgrown, mischievous youth with twinkling dark eyes and an air of guileless simplicity, until one's inspection hesitated at the shape of the nose and then discovered that it was the nose of a leader, or a general—a nose of action and courage. He scarcely glanced at us, but stood there head and shoulders above old Mario, grinning fondly down upon him and planting a huge hand on his shoulder.

Those two talked in their native dialect, harsh, and—to both Giuseppe and me—unintelligible. Their conversation at the moment was cursory, and not prolonged; but after we had eaten the comforting meal and returned to the public room, which was a combination bar and lounge, Mario after a gesture to us, joined the padrone. The latter called to some one in the rear to mind the bar, and then went out with Mario.

"If it weren't that I know deep into the heart of old Mario," Giuseppe muttered to me, as if piqued by our desertion, "I should suspect him of giving us what is called in America the double cross."

"Pshaw! That padrone is an old fellow countryman and friend of his, and they probably want to swap yarns," I exclaimed.

"Not Mario! Look here! What do you suppose that old bully of a Calabrian padrone is doing this far away from his own country? Did you notice when they met to-night a funny little signal that passed between them at which both smiled?" Giuseppe twisted on his bench to look at me as he questioned, but I admitted that I had observed nothing unusual.

"I wonder—I wonder if that padrone, who looks like a reformed—or

unreformed—cutthroat, might not have been with Mussoli himself. Perhaps he's here because his own country might be too hot for him. I'm certain that's why Mario never went back there. If that is so——" He stopped, frowned, and drummed abstractedly with his fingers on the table top, then suddenly looked at me with veiled suspicion in his clear eyes.

"No, no, no! Not that!" I replied, as if to spoken words. "It's up to neither of us to suspect old Mario!"

"You're right," he said after a moment, as if ashamed of his distrust. "But why this queer secrecy? He never mentioned this man until we reached here."

"But I haven't a doubt, if his conversation is any concern of ours, that he will tell us in his own time and way," I insisted.

Giuseppe growled, "Perhaps," and then his face slowly cleared as if reason had swept away his doubts.

The long dusk gave way to night. A woman with wooden clogs entered and lighted above the bar one or two lamps that seemed merely to accentuate its dirt. Then she gathered a stool and lighted a big lamp with a tin reflector that hung in the center of the room from a crude old beam. The darkness thickened, and we were conversing aimlessly when I had that peculiar feeling of being stared at, and turned to see over my shoulder a window from which two faces like white spots against a black background hurriedly moved away. They looked like the faces of village oafs, both smoothly shaven but loutish. Giuseppe and I sat meditating, and saying nothing, when abruptly he, too, turned and stared at the window, then scowled.

"A couple of fellows bearded like pirates glaring at us, and behind them was a third whom I caught pointing at us," he said. "You'd think this place was big enough so the town wouldn't

come and gawk at strangers through a window, wouldn't you?"

"You Italians are a curious people," I said. "Hello! Here comes Mario; but he seems to have lost his pal."

He must have overheard me for he said: "Yes, lost him just this moment. He caught sight of some loafers in his little yard—just through this window behind you—and is chasing them out. But, see here. I have been talking to him about our—— No, no! *Per Bacco!* Don't think I make any mistake in trusting Gigi. There are not only some slight reasons why he should stick by me, but"—his voice fell to a murmur—"he is one of us. Understand? No? Well, he doesn't like to pay customs duties and makes many little deals with other people who don't."

"Smuggler himself, eh?" I asked.

"Certainly," said Mario, with a grin; "and knows all the latest routes, where the guards are most active at present, and the number of them. And he has some friends up there on the frontier who work with him." He chuckled, wagged his head, and added: "Nice, small, compact gang! Always the best. Picked men. Men who trust one another. But I'm sorry to say the border has changed, up there in the mountains, since I was last here. It is well that I talked with him."

The entrance of the giant checked him and I looked with new interest at this Gigi. He halted just inside the doorway and stood there looking at the window behind us as if meditating. His customary good nature seemed to have been dropped like a mask, for he appeared serious.

"Those weren't village boys—or men," he growled across at us in surprisingly adequate English. "There was something funny about those fellows. And I don't think they were customs men, or customs spies, or—— *Per Bacco!* I don't know what they

were, or what they were up to—sneaking around my place that way. I don't like it! *Madonna!* No!"

Then he came across to us and threw himself into a chair opposite, quite as if we were old and intimate friends, although up to that moment he hadn't exchanged a half dozen words with Giuseppe or me. It was as if he knew all about us, and accepted us as of his ilk.

"See here," he said, suddenly lapsing into good Italian, "I'm going to send *Il Gufo* with you to-morrow." And disregarding us for the moment, he turned and roared for the woman who sometimes looked after the bar. He ordered with particularity a special wine for all of us. In the meantime I glanced at Giuseppe, for like him I was questioning the intrusion of this man whom our host called "The Owl," and without asking our consent, or ideas, was foisting upon us.

"*Il Gufo*," he said, swinging his big body around on his seat so that he again faced us, "has more cunning, more wisdom, than any man in these parts. He never forgets faces, and in a pinch can take care not only of himself but of a few others. *Il Gufo* isn't a man that—that even I, who could take him apart with my hands, would seek trouble with. I'm going to send him with you, and if there is something going on that I can't foresee, you do just what he tells you to do. Take my word for it: if he can't get you through, the twelve apostles and all the saints would fail."

It seemed rather a fulsome declaration, but I was convinced the big man believed it. Also there was no use in making any objections, for it was fully evident that old Mario had given him full details, despite the fact that throughout all my acquaintanceship with the former he had been almost embarrassingly taciturn. It was too late now to do anything. We had to submit to this new combination in our affair,

but I resolved then and there to carry my automatic where it could be quickly available, and to keep an eye on this man, *Il Gufo*.

Also I momentarily doubted old Mario, or at least his discretion. Why hadn't he consulted us before opening himself and our projects up to this giant of whom we knew nothing? Who the devil was this Gigi, anyhow? Why hadn't Mario told us more about him before we reached this stop, the very last one we should make before getting into the thick of it? Had he been afraid, or foreseen that we might make emphatic objections; or was it merely that exigency, the learning of altered conditions along the frontier, had caused him to act without consulting us? It was disturbing and puzzling.

Again he and Mario were ignoring Giuseppe and me and were talking in their barbaric *dialette*. Four times I heard the name Mussoli and surmised that they were reminiscing over that picturesque brigand. Once or twice they enjoyed a mutual laugh, and once the big man, as if enraged by some memory, brought his great hand thumping down on the table and spouted a string of oaths and objurgations that were partially but shockingly understandable—a terrible combination of blasphemies that rolled from lips that were no longer good-natured, but snarling like those of an infuriated lion.

Mario clicked his tongue as if appalled by such invocations of evil; and Gigi stopped midway, rubbed his eyes, heaved his shoulders, recovered himself, and said to me, apologetically and in English:

"Excuse me, Mr. Hall. I was speaking of the men who killed my brother. *Carabaneri* they were. They'd have killed me, too, if old Mario here—good old Mario—hadn't got me away."

I had a sudden inspiration.

"Was your brother called Mussoli?" I asked, leaning toward him.

"How did you know?" he asked. And then, when I did not immediately reply, he said to Mario in Italian: "What do you think of that, old one? Your friend, the Signore Hall, understands Calabresi!"

As if this were a matter to celebrate, he shouted to the woman to bring more of what he esteemed his choicest wine, and drank to my health. But although Mario stared at me in bewilderment, I now comprehended the tie between these two men, and what Mario had meant when he said there were "some slight reasons" why this man Gigi would "stick by" him. If saving a friend's life in a bloody battle isn't sufficient to found a lasting gratitude, what does suffice?

CHAPTER VII.

THE PHANTOM PURSUIT.

IT isn't boasting on my part to assert that I am an abstemious man. But that rare wine which the giant insisted on our drinking was insidious and potent. I retired much too contented. I recall that the number of stairs ascending to my room seemed endless and that the bed looked entrancingly welcome.

And then somebody thumped on my door and, as if to do me personal honor, the giant himself entered with a grin and a pitcher of hot water and a rare pick-me-up of some strange decoction. It was morning!

"By the time you've had your breakfast," he said cheerfully, "I think Il Gufo will be here. Also, let me warn you that I lied to him a little bit when I got hold of him last night after you—hah!—got tired and went to bed. Todd him you were an old friend of mine and whatever he did for you was a favor to me. Of course you know what we say down in Calabria——" And he rattled off something about the obligations of friendship. "So you needn't pay him anything."

Another doubt that had lurked re-

garding Mario's independent action, a wonder whether we were to share profits with this gang he had enlisted, was swept aside.

"But," I protested, "I am willing to pay. It's only fair to him, when he helps, that I should slip him a hundred dollars or so."

Over his face came a puzzled look, which I didn't interpret as due to the concentration of mental calculation until he said: "A hundred dollars. That is—— How many lire is that, my friend? I know but little of dollars. Now if you had said pounds, or shillings, or pence—— What is a hundred dollars?" And then, before I could reply, he cried: "No, no, Signore Hall. Give him nothing. I would do this for Il Pugnale."

He poured some of the hot water into the bowl, squinted at it, muttered something about the room having been unoccupied for so long that everything was dusty, uttered some frightful maledictions upon some servant's slovenliness, cleansed the bowl and emptied it, and then turned to me.

"Isn't it fortunate that when he and I were spattering over in our lingo last night it was before a friend? Shows what a mistake one can make in believing no one about understands. But it is rare to find a stranger—and an American, too, of all people!—who has the Calabrese. When I guessed last night that you had understood all our talk—— *Per Bacco!* We had talked too much! And had you not been Mario's friend, of course I should have had to kill you."

A ripple slipped up my spine, while he laughed as cheerfully as if at some joke.

"I, too, fought in the war," he went on, quite blithely. "But I hadn't old Mario's luck; I did nothing to get all my past forgiven by the king's pardon. Why, signore, there grow dusty in the police archives printed rewards offering

some thousands of lire for me, dead or alive. I don't like that part which makes no difference between the two conditions. I used to think it would be but justice to myself to write the government and say that such an offer wasn't fair—it was too much like buying murder.

"Myself, I never have killed when there was any other way to decide matters. It's—it's unpleasant. All I can hope for now is to get enough to retire and live on. A cousin of mine in America writes me to come over there. He makes what you call the bootleg, and thinks that an honest, hard-working man like I am can do quickly what here takes time—make enough money. But what would you? I hate to leave Italy again. I was away from it for ten years, and always I wanted to come back! You Americans are queer people. You always want to shave yourselves. Well, here is your hot water; and when you come down I shall myself cook your breakfast."

I thanked my lucky stars while I shaved that this gentle ruffian accepted me, on Mario's voucher, as a friend. Otherwise it might have been, as he said, "unpleasant."

The Owl came just as I was finishing the special breakfast that the huge padrone had prepared. I was wondering if Gigi hadn't served time in some English hotel; for there was a typical English breakfast with excellent bacon, nicely cooked eggs, marmalade, and quite decent coffee, the last of which I was swallowing when Giuseppe, Mario, and the giant, ushered in a little man who looked not unlike a village schoolmaster. He was evidently a Northerner, and this was confirmed when he made an exclamation in Milanese. He was the last man in the world upon whom I would have bestowed a laurel wreath for either wisdom or craft. I couldn't at all make him out. Had it not been for the reputation given by

the giant, I should have most promptly declared an aversion to his company, or any participation of his in our enterprise. His pallid, staring eyes; his immobile face; his expressionlessness in looks, speech, and action all made him appear a negative dullard. There was not an indication of either mental or physical strength in him.

He sagged into a chair opposite me, as I finished that coffee, and my eyes, lifting to meet his as I lifted the thick cup, for the first time caught him unawares. I had a sense that he had appraised all the others and was now measuring me. Quite as if he was taking the measurement of the men with whom he must deal in an adventurous and hazardous job. For a full four or five seconds we thus gauged each other, unblinking; and then a frosty smile twisted his thin lips and he nodded, speechlessly, as if I had passed satisfactorily.

"You are traveling as a geologist, I understand," he said; "and these as helpers or companions?" He flicked his hand in a comprehensive gesture toward Giuseppe and Mario.

"As employees," I replied.

"Then," said he, "I shall go and change my clothes and take the part of a fellow scientist, or companion. Three employees would be too many. We naturally hope to avoid either close inspection or questions; but it is always well to be prepared for emergencies. I am told that your car is at the garage. I will meet you there in fifteen or twenty minutes. Have you spare blankets, in case we have to sleep out? We might be detained. And how about food? Not that I require much, but I like to travel comfortably. I am a man who dislikes physical discomforts. None but a fool does tolerate them or unnecessary dangers. Sometimes one has to endure both, but that is almost invariably an indication of lack of forethought."

And then up he got without another word or gesture and trudged outward. He had reached the garage before. I did—with a huge roll of blankets bound with a rope heavy enough to have moored a schooner—and when I entered stood staring at the very motor cycle that had attracted my attention. His glance wandered to the others beside it and he reflectively scratched his chin as if pondering something, then turned and walked out into the street and disappeared. I made my few preparations, backed the car out and assisted Giuseppe and Mario to spread blankets over that deceptive locker to form cushions. They had decided to ride there, leaving the seat beside me to Il Gufo. All was in readiness to start. Five minutes stretched to ten, then to fifteen, and he had not returned.

"I wonder where the devil he went?" I said to Giuseppe: "He was here when I came, so must have known we would start immediately."

And just then he appeared around a corner and without any explanations asked: "Where do I ride?" When shown, he climbed to the seat without a word and, save for a terse, "Right," or "Left," or "Straight ahead," as he gave me directions, said nothing until we were clear of the town and several kilometers on our way. Glancing at him sidewise now and then I surmised that he was deep in thought, as if mulling over some problem. Yet his first question seemed irrelevant.

"Were all those motor cycles there in that garage when you came in last night?"

"I'm certain that one was, and some others," I replied.

"Some? What do you mean by 'some'? How many were there?"

"Good Lord! I didn't stop to count them," I answered, somewhat nettled by his tone. "Why? Do you always count things like that?"

"Always. One should. Perfect ob-

servation is frequently valuable; one never knows. Was that one with the Naples license on it there?"

"Yes," I admitted. "Of that one I am sure, because—" And I told him of how and when I had seen it before and of my reason for recalling it. He asked several more questions regarding it before dropping the subject, and then relapsed into silence. No, not into silence, but into himself, for he hummed over and over again a monotonous little tune. He seemed oblivious to me as well as his surroundings. Then suddenly he startled me with another question:

"Whereabouts in this car do you keep that bronze you found and are smuggling? And can I have a look at it?"

I hesitated for a fraction of a minute before answering; and then realized that if we had been betrayed, and led into a trap, decoyed into a conspiracy to wrest it from us, nothing could be gained by evasion. So I told him where we kept it, and that it was crated in straw.

"All right," he said. "Turn off into the first lane to the left. A farmer's lane it is, so untraveled. And there I'll look at it."

I did as directed, watching him narrowly all the time. When the locker was cleared of the plunder thrown over the crate, and it was fully exposed, he did not even bend over to examine it, but after scanning it from one end to the other asked:

"How much does it weigh?"

"About three hundred and twenty or thirty pounds," I ventured—"really too much for one man to carry, and not a heavy burden for two."

But he seemed scarcely to hear me, and climbed back into his seat as an indication that he was ready to proceed. We ran into a little mountain village with a single street before he said anything again; and then, just as we were passing a post office, he clutched my

arm and said: "Stop. I will use the telephone." Then, muttering words half inaudible about, "something overlooked," he dropped out and left us.

I would have given something to have been able to overhear that conversation and by now was wondering whether I should try to confide in Giuseppe that I feared we were running into a trap; but I could think of no way to separate him from old Mario. I detested the thought of having to suspect that rugged old man. It didn't seem possible that he could have willingly betrayed us. Yet, suppose he had, through dependence upon old associations, babbled too much? My mind reverted to Gigi, the complex giant who was a self-confessed brigand and murderer. He had a frank, impetuous way; but so had Judas Iscariot. Since the beginning of greed men had been sold for pieces of silver, and the pieces for which we gambled were of gold.

When Il Gufo returned to the car and said we could drive on, I watched him. His wasn't a face one could read too readily. Besides, I hadn't known it long enough to interpret his moods; but I felt that something had gone awry with him. He became more alert. He took to leaning out at intervals and staring back over the road. He scowled into every side path and lane we passed as we sped upward into the very heart of an untenanted desolation. The main road itself was not good, for this was a highway but little used since the war, and in whole sections it was touched by the blight of neglect. Culverts were crumbling. The approaches to bridges had bumps at their aprons. Here and there summer torrents had cut the macadam, and in one of these places we came to soft earth bearing the marks of wheels, nearly all of narrow-tread carts. Il Gufo seized my arm and shouted to halt; and when, fearful of something I hadn't realized, I brought the car up on its hind wheels, he climbed out and

ran ahead. He nosed here and there, threw up his hands, and beckoned me.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

He pointed at the ground. I saw no cause for alarm and said so, mentally questioning whether he was a madman or a fool.

"There—there—and there," he said, bending over and pointing.

"All I can see," said I, "are the tracks of— What are they? Oh, yes. Motor bikes. What of that?"

For a moment he stared at me as if regarding a monument of stupidity. Then he lowered his hands with a gesture of helplessness and asked, almost savagely:

"Could you run backward, turn into the first side road, get this car turned around somehow, then run back the way we came—but off to one side, so as to leave no track?"

"But—but for Heaven's sake, why?" I demanded.

"Because you're running into a trap," he declared; "because some one has got men ahead of you on motor cycles; and, if I'm not wrong, because there will come others behind, following you." And then he demanded, angrily: "Are you following my suggestions, or am I to follow yours?"

"I agreed to accept yours," I said.

"Then do what I tell you; and do it quickly," he growled. And I saw no better course than to obey.

We found an entry into a pasture a few hundred yards behind, a cove overgrown with scant grass where I could make the turn. He got out and scuffed his feet over the few traces. The main road over which we retraced our way was broad enough to enable me, with many jolts and an occasional heavy bump in ditches, to keep to its side. We ran thus for a quarter of a mile before we came to another lane, overgrown with grass, narrow, bordered by rough stone walls, and plainly used for nothing other than access and egress when

certain interior crops were carted to market. Into this we ventured. It wound with a far more erratic course than a snail's trail over the crest of a hill and thence down into a swale where a clump of forest—pine and fir trees—formed a screened glade. It was well out of sight from the main highway. It was an ideal place for a gypsy encampment.

"Turn out here," Il Gufo commanded. And I drove the car across sparse grass into the shelter of the trees. We had not stopped before he was off, running through the woods as if in the greatest haste. Rendered apprehensive by his actions and his certainty that the tracks of the motor bikes ahead meant a trap, we sat in the car for a while and waited.

"I don't get his reason," I said to the others.

"But he has them," Mario rumbled. "Along lots of this border—and we aren't far from it now—almost all the men of the customs have motor cycles. Perhaps there was something about the marks made by their tires that he recognized. He should know."

"Yes," Giuseppe guessed, "perhaps the government buys a special tire for the work. If so, and we are suspected, and that is a trap, and they are watching for us——"

He threw his hands up in a Neapolitan gesture, rubbing his throat outward toward his chin—a recognized sign for, "Finished! All over!"

At the end of twenty minutes we got down from the car, our anxiety increased by his prolonged absence. But at the end of half an hour he came back, still on the run, and began sputtering at us.

"We can tear a hole in the wall on the other side of these trees," he said, "which lets us across a field that has been mowed and where there are many wheel marks made by the harvesters' wagons. Across that there is another

patch of timber we can get into, and there, recently, the woodcutters have been at work and there is a wood road that goes westward. It is almost certain to come out into another larger road that is probably parallel to this one we have traveled this morning, for the last hour or so. We must get into it. It's the best we can do."

I drove the car at his heels, and behind us Giuseppe and Mario swept out the few traces it made here and there over the pine needles in its passage. When we reached the wall, we fell to and demolished a section sufficient for us to drive through. Il Gufo then insisted that we restore the wall, taking care to destroy all marks of its having been molested by carefully replacing the mossed sides of the stones in their approximate places. We chugged across the harvested field to the opposite side, again opened a wall, and as carefully closed it behind us. Then we drove into the wood road. After we had run a mile, we came to an abandoned house, part of the roof of which had fallen in, but which had evidently been used as a camp by the woodcutters until their work was accomplished.

"Run the car in behind, and we'll stop here until I can reconnoiter and decide what to do," Il Gufo said. And having completely surrendered ourselves to his directions thus far, we continued obedient. Again he prepared to leave us, snatching a handful of food and stuffing his pockets with biscuits.

"You act as if you were going for a long time," I remarked.

"I may or may not be; but I can't tell and I always go prepared," he said, grinning. "But, whatever happens, you three must remain here until I return. Don't forget that if customs officers should come you have nothing to fear. You have done nothing wrong that can be proven. No, they can't prove that it was your intention to smuggle that thing of yours out of the country.

So keep your seats in the saddle and tell them anything you like. There's no earthly reason why a mad foreigner shouldn't be geologizing here as well as anywhere else, is there?"

Before I could reply he had gone, hurrying down the woodcutters' road, and soon a bend cut him from sight. The day passed slowly. For the want of something better to do I cleaned and made a few adjustments in the engines, put in fresh spark plugs, drained the crank case, and did the scores of trifling things one can find to do with a car that has done a long, hard journey with but scant attention. Giuseppe slept, but old Mario sat on the ground cross-legged near me, perpetually smoking and brooding. Only once did he display any impatience.

"*Per Bacco!* What luck!" he said. "But for this we would to-night have been at the frontier, watching; and when the time was ripe we would have slipped across. Gigi's plan was to distract the attention of the men at the post, lead them a chase, and while the guard was thus decoyed away, make a dash for it. It seemed that this might be simple. But now—who knows?"

So plainly was he veracious that all the peculiar little things he had done and which had aroused my suspicions were swept away. But he started to say more, and then, as if suddenly aware that he was saying too much, broke off in the midst of a sentence. And looking at him, I saw that in his eyes which brought my vague questions back, for I was certain that behind his eyes was a secret in which neither Giuseppe nor I were participants.

I wanted to think alone, and after cleansing my hands with petrol, wandered out through the woods and looked upon a country that was surprisingly savage for such an old, old land. Nowhere was there a human being, a house, or farmstead in sight. For the greater part it was a barren country, in the

roughness of hills that, but a few miles beyond, broke into masses of tortured, torn mountains. Off in the distance could be seen peaks white with perpetual snows. Once, vaguely and from afar, there came a strange murmur when an avalanche, loosened by the late summer's sun, broke away and swept downward. To add to the difficulty of believing oneself in Italy, the trees were filled with song birds, and in that land of beauty even a humble sparrow is hunted, and the flying thing which sings is killed oftener than all others. I thought to myself how this land of Italy is the most unmusical of all. It is rare that any one can even remember a melody, and hoarse screams take the place of song. I wondered if the dearth of feathered songsters hadn't something to do with this peculiar tonal lack.

Ruminating, I wandered idly, and must have made a semicircle, for I found myself in a farm lane that looked familiar. I paused, wondering if I had lost myself, and then recognized the lane as the one we had traversed that morning after leaving the main highway. Dusk had fallen, and reminded me that I must return to the camp, lest the others become alarmed by my long absence. And just then I heard off in the direction of the main road a peculiar throbbing, punctuated roar. I stopped and listened; and although I could see nothing, I knew, as the noise increased, that it was made by rapidly ridden motor cycles. I stood there listening like a hare in its retreat until that distant noise had grown from a faint murmur to a crescendo of sound, and had then died away diminuendo to silence. There had been four of them, one after the other.

And then some prescience warned me that a chase was on and that we were the ones those riders sought. If this were true, all the precautions which had been taken by Il Gufo, the wise man, and which at the time I had secretly

scorned, had been good. In that light the customs men could scarcely observe that the marks of the car wheels were no longer advancing up that lonely highway. They would ride onward to their post, to be met with the surprising information that no car had been seen that day.

Then I found myself considering the entire alarm and said to myself, "Pshaw! How could any one suspect us? That Gufo, the Owl, through being cunning and secretive for Lord knows how many years, builds nightmares without occasion—befools his fellow smugglers by a pretense of profound foresight and deduction. Those riders may or may not have been customs officers; but probably they were merely some outfit of cyclists out for a holiday excursion in the hills. Furthermore, there's no logic on earth can connect them with the two motor cycles ahead of us this morning. Il Gufo is a fool."

And reasoning thus, it seemed to me that we had lost a day's progress, needlessly got ourselves off our route, done a lot of foolish, dirty labor by pulling down and rebuilding two walls, and would have done better had we gone our own way without the assistance of either the giant Gigi or his lauded henchman.

When I reached the hut where we were camped, I found Giuseppe cooking our supper, and Mario unduly troubled by my long absence. I thought so little of the passing of the motor cyclists that I did not even mention them. Also, I was hungry; and Giuseppe's preparations filled the air with a most appetizing smell of bacon and eggs, of fried onions and potatoes, of freshly opened tins of fruit and steaming coffee. We fell upon and enjoyed that meal. Then we lounged and smoked.

It was only old Mario who seemed restless and discontented. He got up at intervals and wandered away into the

starlit darkness; and, always, when he reappeared, said, as if imparting news, or given over to croaking, like the proverbial raven: "Il Gufo comes not. Where can he have gone? Is he nevermore coming back?" He varied this by asking us: "Do you suppose anything could have happened to him?" And of course neither Giuseppe nor I could answer. Finally, composing himself on the broken doorstep, Mario hunched himself over and left us to our casual remarks. We were thus passing time, when he suddenly jumped to his feet and said: *S-s-sh!* Listen! I can't hear for your talk."

Feeling that something had demanded his attention, we got up and joined him. Then the three of us advanced farther—out into the night where the quiet pine trees stood motionless and silent, silhouetted against the stars, as if brooding over their companions that had fallen to the murderous axes of the woodsmen after so many decades of companionable security. The silence that pervades a group of listeners fell upon us; there came breathless pause in which men who have not-quite-clean consciences strain their ears and are alert.

Far away we heard the sound of a running engine. When barriers of forest or the barricades of hills cut it off it would lapse, only to be renewed when these were passed. It became clearer. It settled into an unbroken threnody. Then it became certain that it was approaching, could be drawing down upon us by only one path—that old wood road leading to our camp. We tightened, as for a climax. Expectation and surmise as to the meaning of such an unexpected event preyed upon us, brought us together. And then into the bar of light from the door a dusty car whipped to a halt. Its engine was silenced, a door catch clicked open, and out sprang Il Gufo. Behind him lumbered forth a huge figure, unmistakably

the giant Gigi. They paid no heed to us, but turned as if waiting for the third member of their party, who was not slow in descent. There was a laugh that sent my overstrung nerves down with a snap, a voice that exulted, "Well, anyhow, we've got this far," and then into that pathway of light came Miss Blake. Miss Blake—of all the enormous number of individuals on earth, and clad in a rough suit of what was a combination of riding breeches, golf coat, and a chauffeur's cap.

"You—here?" I cried.

"Yep," she said cheerily. "It's me; and I'm here!"

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNDERSTANDING.

THAT grizzled old Mario reached her first, caught her hand to his lips, and fell back like a slave in adoration of a beloved master, still bowing. The light from the open door of the cabin flashed upon the whiteness of his teeth as he smiled. That old fool, infatuated, craved from a lonely heart for some one to serve. But for me this was a matter of vexation mingled with delight—delight to meet her once more, this comrade of ours; and vexation because she had come upon us when there might be work at hand in which the presence of a woman could prove ruinous. Giuseppe had greeted her before I could collect these conflicting sentiments.

"Well, Roberto," she called across the lighted path, "aren't you glad to see me?"

I forgot myself at her insouciance.

"I'm damned if I am!" I blurted with brutal sincerity. "How did you get here, and why did you come?" Then, relenting, I walked to meet her, and caught and held her outstretched hand in both of mine, bending down to stare at her, and oblivious to all the others.

"That can be told after we've had something to eat," she answered, and it

seemed to me that she flushed as she slowly released her hand from my hard clutch. "What a place to camp!" she cried, peering upward at the silhouetted trees. "What a lovely old house! What it could tell! It makes me think of an abandoned farm I once saw in France, after the war. But here's Gigi Mussoli and you haven't said anything to him." And then, as I greeted the grinning giant, Miss Blake went on: "What is there to eat?"

There was nothing one could do in such a torrent. Also Giuseppe was shouting something, old Mario was edging a few words about the excellence of Giuseppe's cooking, and the giant had moved to the doorway and was sniffing inward with an explorer's zest. We went inside. Then there were demands for a basin and soap and water, and comments on the community towel and a general and pervading distraction. They busied themselves with the supper, and we others served them, waiting until their hunger was sated.

"Well, I am still waiting to know why you are here," I said to Miss Blake, trying to conceal my anxieties. The more I thought of her presence the more inimical it appeared.

She seemed to sense this and there was a flash of rebellion in her eyes as she walked across and seated herself on one of the clumsy stools left by the woodcutters. She deliberately lighted her cigarette and blew a cloud of smoke toward the rough black rafters; and the others, as if surmising that something had to be thrashed out between us, maintained silence, leaving all explanations to her.

"It's a good thing for you that I made up my mind to come," she said, defiantly. "Wasn't I entitled to see the most exciting part of it, when I am almost a sort of a partner in all this? Huh? Didn't I help find it and——"

"Of course! Of course!" I agreed, recognizing the justice of the latter

claim. Also her voice had warmed to a note of appeal that I found it difficult to resist. "But there's so much I can't understand that I wish you'd begin at the beginning, and tell me. Don't think I'm churlish, or anything that way; but——"

"But you don't want me here," she said, disappointed.

"No, I don't. Not because——"

"It's because you think a woman might be in the way, and can't do what a man might do, and would have to be protected if—if things got rough. Well, I can take care of myself. And I can prove that I can help take care of the others better than you can—in some things!"

"But, my dear Miss Blake, this isn't a personal quarrel!" I protested. And after meeting my eyes for a moment, she laughed with good nature restored.

"When you started off, none of you asked me to come along," she cried. "It wasn't fair, if you regarded me as one of you. So I told Mario, the dear old thing, just how I felt about it. And I told him that there were women smugglers as well as men, and that never again might I get a chance to be in anything so exciting. You see, Mario's the best friend I've got in this crowd. And after that night when I helped him recover the proceeds of——"

"When you helped him to stick up the Bene Fratelli," I interjected, with a grin of recollection.

"Yes," she responded with a little laugh. "Well, Mario seemed to think I was pretty game. We had a lot of talks you and Giuseppe knew nothing about. He used to tell me—— Never mind, the point is this: he finally agreed, though somewhat reluctantly, to keep me informed, so I could be in at the killing when it was time."

"And he never said anything to us, who trusted——" I began.

"But how could he," she interrupted, "after I made him swear not to tell?

After all, it wasn't settled that I could come, even on that night when he met me there in Florence, at the address I had given him. We hadn't time enough to talk it over."

"So that's where that old goat went that night while I was at the haberdasher's, eh?" I growled, frowning at Mario, who sat staring absently out of the door, totally unconcerned, although his name had been running through our words. He wasn't even listening, or regarding us, but was totally engrossed in some private meditation.

"Yes, that's where he went—to see me. Then, after that, he did just what I told him to; sent me word either by mail or wire at every place where you stopped and it was possible. Also he wrote me a letter outlining the plans you had made. And he sent me a card of introduction to Gigi, and told him all about me and to look after me, if I did come. Mario's an ace, a positive old pal; and I love him!"

"All of which doesn't explain the advantages of your presence here now," I made the dry comment.

And then arose an unexpected defender in the person of the giant Gigi, who had been listening with twitching lips and amused eyes.

"I should like to say," he remarked, "that without Miss Blake we couldn't have known, until perhaps too late, just what you are up against. Indeed, I don't see how we could have known. I call it more than lucky that she was in my inn with my wife all the time that you stopped there. She got there two or three hours ahead of you; came by the diligence from the railway. Mario knew it. But he thought you and Giuseppe would raise such a noise about it that, on my advice, he said nothing. But you see, it was like this: If she hadn't been there and, just after you left this morning, seen him, and at once recognized him, you'd never have known that you have been dogged all the way from

Naples by the thief that robbed you of your first find, and that he's up to mischief!"

"What? What's that?" both Giuseppe and I cried, jumping to our feet in our excitement. And through my mind ran that coincidence—that series of coincidences—of encountering the motor cycle with the Neapolitan license. I blurted something of that aloud. "Yes," Gigi said, "you've got it. That was what he rode. And how much he knows, or how he got to know it, is hard to guess. But Il Gufo and I are positive he does know that you've got something big on hand, and that he's got together a gang of his own, and that they're out to highjack you—as they say in America—either before or after you get across the frontier. Maybe one, maybe the other. If I were handling the job and in his place, it would be across the border and not before! I'd let you do the first dirty work, then get you."

I was so astonished by all this that I fairly sagged back to my seat, staring from one to another. It seemed incredible. I said so.

"Incredible or not, it's so," the giant quietly asserted. "I can tell you when Il Gufo sets his mind to putting things together he—— Well, I've never known him to make a mistake. Here, listen to this part you do know. That motor bike and three others were in the garage when you got there last night. During the night two more arrived. That made six. The last two were met by the other riders, because they—the first four—were getting anxious about them and kept waiting around, and were there when they came. The boy at the garage pretends to be hard of hearing, although he's got ears like a cat. He's the son of the owner. Both of them are part of my crew, and it's their business to overhear things, and to keep us posted. And sometimes the police have trouble with a car after it has left the

garage and they can't travel very far or very fast!"

He grinned cheerfully, and I understood his inference.

"This bunch of Neapolitan thugs thought the boy was deaf," he continued. "They said enough to let him know that they were on a hot chase; that something was to be pulled off either to-night or to-morrow night; that they believe it to be a big thing; and that it was you, and Mario, and Giuseppe they were after. They were the ones who were sneaking around my place last night, and it was the thief Mario held up who was pointing you all out, Il Gufo thinks."

"By heavens! It might be that!" I exclaimed. "None of the others could have ever seen us before, eh?"

"Very likely," Giuseppe agreed.

"There was one slip," Gigi went on. "That fool boy, whose father had to go away last evening, never told me about this until after you had gone this morning—in fact, not until after Il Gufo, badgering his head over that Neapolitan license and so many other motor cycles in the garage—a most unusual thing!—decided to telephone and warn me to make inquiries."

"I wondered at that telephone business," I remarked. "But why didn't he tell me what he feared?"

"That's not his way. Besides, he suspected it might be a police move in some of our private deals that—well, are not connected with you.

"Then, when he saw that there were two motor bikes ahead of you, later in the day, and couldn't mentally account for them, but feared they were ridden by customs police, he took no further chances. He never does. He always plays for safety. You think he doesn't reason? Well, then, how do you account for this? He made up his mind that if there was anything afoot I would learn of it at that end and come as fast as I could to overtake you; that

not being warned, I would keep to the route we had planned; and that if I did come, I must be intercepted before reaching the lane into which you turned off. So he kept on until he came to the main road, then up that about a mile or so to where there is a farmer, who doesn't lose anything by being friendly to us. There he got a saddle horse and by riding hard for some four or five miles got to a place on the main road where I must pass if I came. And there he waited until we did come."

"But those two first motor cycles—do you know who they were?" Giuseppe asked.

"Yes," answered Gigi, "I got that from the garage boy. They were two of the Naples gang. One of the men had been up this way before, and they were to stop a mile or so this side of the frontier to make sure whether you did, or didn't, pass. They had your route well guessed—by the man who knows the ropes up this way and who seemed to think it the only way you would attempt. Well, that fellow was right. In fact, he knows too damned much about this country up here. That lad isn't ever going back to Naples. We shall see to that!"

There was a grim significance in his words and his quiet declaration that made me very thankful that the giant and his gang were friends, rather than enemies, of ours. I hadn't a doubt that he or any of his men would have regarded the death of an enemy as being merely a business necessity, and would have snuffed him out with no compunction or remorse. Yet, to their friends—Well, men of that kind are difficult to fathom.

A silence had fallen on all of us, or at least in my own absorption I wasn't aware that any of the others were talking until I looked up, desiring to ask a question of that peculiar, almost uncanny man, Il Gufo, and learned that he was not with us. At some time while

we were talking, perhaps before we had begun, he had slipped away with such catlike quietude that I hadn't as much as missed him.

"What does Il Gufo think of it now?" I asked the giant,

"Who can tell? *Madonna mia!* I never know his brain wriggles until he's ready to tell me," Gigi said. "I don't even know where he is now, or why he has gone; but it's not unlikely that he's prowling around up there where you turned off the road, to see if by any chance the motor outfit has returned looking for you, or to find where you gave them the slip. Some of my men claim he can see in the dark, and that's why they call him the Owl. But I don't know about that; I never knew a man who could, and don't believe there is such. Did you ever see one?"

Before I could utter my denial, Il Gufo himself appeared in the doorway and, with that same soft suppleness, slid to a seat.

"I've been up to the head of that lane," he said, addressing Gigi and proving that the giant's conjecture was right, "but if those fellows have found out that they've lost us, they can't do much before daylight. By then it will be a trifle late. My plan is to get to the first place you and I talk of—you know—for getting across. On the way, we'll fool them again. We can do that at Tama's place. Then if we trip them there, before they can find us, we should by darkness be just where we want to be. It's too bad that we have to take this route rather than the other. Much harder work, although equally sure. Don't you think so?"

The giant sat and pondered; and then for ten or twenty minutes they discussed the risks as if the affair were theirs, not ours.

"Of course there's the chance that we've already got them thrown so far off the scent that they'll not pick it up at all," Il Gufo commented, almost as

if soliloquizing. "I think that's quite possible; but it's not wise to take any risk. What does your old friend Mario think of it? He's no one's fool."

And while the giant turned and talked in Calabrese to Mario, I spoke to Miss Blake, who had been listening with rapt, excited eyes, enjoying all this conspiracy, chase, and peculiar adventure.

"You had better turn back to-morrow with the small car, hadn't you? You surely can't be determined, after what you have heard, to go with us," I said to her.

She grinned in that way that always made me feel that there was much of the dare-devil boy in her and said: "Nonsense! Of course I'm going to see it through. Why, it's going to be heaps more exciting than I had ever hoped for."

I thought it wise to take her outside, where we could talk without interruption; and there, walking in the light of brilliant stars and a waning moon, I remonstrated, pleaded, but nothing could have been more futile. Her mind was set on this adventure. She overflowed with zest. Mario, who knew this land and this sort of thing, had made no objections that amounted to anything, she insisted, and so why should I? And all that Gigi had done was to roll and chuckle about it. Surely if there were many chances of danger or compromise, he would have told her, wouldn't he?

"For the Lord's sake!" I cried in ultimate exasperation. "Can't you understand that men like Mario and Gigi—both of whom are at heart nothing more than bandits—don't see things as we do? Or at least, as I do! They don't even regard women as we do. If a woman's a fighter she's as good to them as man in their peculiar and shady affairs. They look on her as such. And the more of a hell cat she is, the more they admire her and treat her as a man."

"Thanks!" she said, offended for the first time and moving toward the hut with angry strides.

"Miss Blake! Miss Blake! Helen!" I called in distress.

Perhaps it was the sound of the latter name that halted her, for she did halt, and turned and stood there until I gained her side. "For the love of Mike!" I said, "don't quarrel with me because I've got your good at heart. Don't you know that if I could agree to this, or anything else you had set your desire upon, I would? It's because I want to protect you that I am opposing you."

She moved closer to me there in the starlight, and lifted her face up as if to better see mine; and then, suddenly, with one of those quick forgivenesses that made her so adorable, she said:

"Roberto—and I think after this I'll call you Bob—I'm a beast, and I do know that you are thinking of my good, and that you would always do so, and that I am an ungrateful wretch for annoying you this way. But you did call me a hell cat, didn't you? Or at least you inferred that I was one. And you——"

I broke into contrite confusion, with denial, explanation and apology all running one into the other. The truth was that the night had gotten into my head and awakened me to the disturbing fact that I loved her, and I was therefore doubly concerned for her welfare, and doubly fervent in my wish to keep her out of further participation in this expedition. Strangely enough, until that night I hadn't cared a rap for the illegality of it, but I was now somewhat ashamed of it—now that it was far too late to retreat! And something of this exploded into words.

"Damn it!" I cried, "if ever I get through this mess, never again will I mix into anything that any law-observing citizen of anywhere can throw a brick at!"

"Me, too!" she said cheerfully, smiling up at my perturbation. "After this once, I'll—I give you my word you can point me out as a model of all the conventions, proprieties, ideals and so forth. I'll quit stealing and I won't lie unless I have to; and the only murderers, brigands, smugglers, and adventurers I'll keep on my list of friends will be you, Gigi, Giuseppe and my dear old Mario!"

It was my turn to say, "Thanks!" but secretly I was wondering if there was a possibility that after the end of this little illicit undertaking, whatever that might be, she would really let me continue to be at least her friend. That seemed too great a hope to ever find fulfillment. Her world was so distant from mine; her whole existence and surroundings were of a far foreign land to which no argosy of mine might ever sail. I must have been thinking longer than I knew, silent, staring unobservant at the thin shadows beneath the trees, for suddenly she laid a hand on mine, where it rested on the top of a moss-grown old wall, and her voice came softly. "Robert—Bob, we haven't known each other very long, but we've learned to know and like each other well—thoroughly, I'm certain. Better than most might through ordinary, conventional years—living and working together as we have. So you should know what I am like, and that it's useless differing over this one thing—the first real dispute we've ever had. I'm going to see this through, but I want it to bind rather than break a fine, decent, good friendship. Shall it be that way?"

"All right," I surrendered. "You win! But if——"

"There aren't going to be any more 'ifs' about it," she laughed, removing her hand after one swift, warm tightening of it. And then she turned and walked rapidly back to the hut.

Between our united contributions we succeeded in making a comfortable bed

for her in the rear room of the old house, and I was glad now for Il Gufo's huge roll of blankets that he generously surrendered. The others were soon audibly asleep, but for a long time I lay there staring into the darkness repenting some episodes of my past life, wishing for many things impossible, and still regretting that impetuosity that had brought Miss Blake into this shabby turmoil, which, with any slight mishap, might prove a sticky mess.

CHAPTER IX.

A BATTLE ON THE TRAIL.

WE were off at dawn. And seldom have I endured a more uncomfortable, trying job of driving, for that cautious fox, Il Gufo, insisted on our running off the road for hours, to avoid making tracks. Sometimes it necessitated prospecting ahead. Sometimes we edged along with the wheels on one side up against a stone wall, and the other wheels in a ditch, with the car canted so perilously that all hands got to the lower side and braced it up to keep it from toppling. We drove over hillocks, boulders, brush heaps, and the ends of culverts. Had I not known that this was probably the last trip that car would ever make, I should have ground my teeth over the torturing of its chassis. Whenever we were compelled to take to the road for a stretch, Il Gufo insisted on brushing out and obliterating the tracks. I'll say that was one thorough man! Half as much forethought, care, pains, and energy, if devoted to any legitimate business on earth, would have made him more wealth and pelf than he could ever gain by smuggling!

Well into the afternoon we reached the man Tama's house. It was off the road by possibly a half mile, but the usual precautions were taken in reaching it. Then we halted and had a real meal.

"Hah! *Per fortuna!* The worst of

that is over!" the giant shouted boisterously, when we descended in front of the place and were greeted by a typical *contadino*. He had splayed bare feet, and his hair and beard, long and matted, almost covered a face from which peered a pair of eyes as round, small, and sharp as a falcon's. Nothing about him was reassuring save his grin, his welcome, and the food he provided. Throughout our entire halt he never spoke one word to any but Il Gufo and Gigi, with whom he was on confidential terms. I couldn't to this day say whether he was a half-witted peasant, a tool of the smuggler gang, or one of those men with the cunning of the wild and the resource of a fox. Judging from the food he produced from some secret store, he must have been valuable to his employers, or fellows—whichever they were—for he provided a banquet incongruous, but rich.

"We will now follow Tama," Il Gufo said, when we were again ready to start. And out we went through a barred gate into a highland pasture: Tama replaced the bars and, mounted on an unkempt but powerful horse, galloped ahead of us, leading us a hard course through valleys, over small divides, into and out of roads built for farm use only, and finally, just as dusk set in, out into a road that appeared to me to have been built during the war, for military purposes, and thereafter abandoned.

"It will end about four miles farther on," Tama said, standing beside his horse. "It begins nowhere, now, and ends nowhere. It is not even guarded, as you know. Once there were an encampment and batteries there." He turned to Il Gufo. You know as well as I how to get on from there. The opposite side of that chasm is clear. The Austrians—or whatever they call themselves—don't even keep a post there. They've no need to, because nobody but a fool would ever think of crossing the

frontier at that point. *Bueno fortune!*" And with that, he mounted, dug his heels into the sides of his hairy steed, and was gone.

For the first time since I had met him Il Gufo seemed carefree, loquacious, certain. He became a babbler, assuring me as we rumbled ahead that now we were secure and certain, and that the worst of it was over.

"All we have to be careful of," he said, "is to be noiseless. There is an Italian frontier post, with perhaps six or eight men in it, about a kilometer from where we cross. But they are like the dormouse, for about all they have to do is sleep. We shall have to carry the bronze, of course, down one side of that cleft and up the other, and then to a safe place that I know. Then you can drive your car back the way we came; and into the main road, across the frontier, and thence around to this place and recover your treasure, and—*pfouff!*—finish! We should wait until that thin moon drops from sight, lest a chance sentry see movement. Perhaps eleven o'clock. No use in taking chances—none whatever—not sensible. The bottom of the gorge is open. There are no trees. Anything moving could be seen if there were light. So, no chances; darkness will be best. I'm certain, now, that everything is almost over; but those cutthroats from Napoli had me worried. Bad lot, those gangs down there. Worse than Sicilians, I am told."

That road, built during the war when labor was cheap but neglected ever since, was still excellent. We ran its length and then came to a halt at its strange ending, which was as abrupt as could be imagined. Here was a place leveled off in solid rock and gun emplacements overlooking a chasm that to me, from the edge, seemed a sheer drop of at least eight hundred feet, and in the approaching twilight it looked as if it had been soaked with purple. A moun-

tain stream shone like silver at the bottom, but was so far away that its rough purling over the boulders in its bed was inaudible. On our side of this beautiful gorge there were not many trees left amid the masses of huge naked boulders; but on the opposite edge, which in an air line was not a half mile away, a solemn forest of pines and firs looked dense, primeval, impenetrable.

"I can't for the life of me see how it's possible for any one to get down there and then scale the other side," I said to Miss Blake, who with me was staring at that wild view.

"But there is, signore," a rumbling voice said; and I turned to see that the giant had come noiselessly behind us. "It is about forty or fifty yards over to the left," he went on, "but it is so well screened by bushes that none would suspect its existence. It's not an easy descent, nor, on the opposite side, an easy ascent. It is for those very reasons that those who run the borders seldom, indeed scarcely ever, make use of it. I doubt if there are more than a half dozen men who know the way. There is a cave, about halfway down, in which there is concealed a ladder without which it would be impossible to make a certain twenty-foot drop. But you can see that for yourself to-night, if all goes well."

"How about me? Can't I see it, too?" Miss Blake demanded.

"Not unless the signorina has a very cool head," Gigi replied, with a deprecatory smile.

"Bosh! I've climbed some of the star points in the Alps," she declared, "so I don't see why I shouldn't go along."

The giant looked at me rather helplessly; but I could do no more than shake my head, knowing that if she was determined to make that descent probably none of us could prevent her. Seeming to sense my thoughts, he shrugged his big shoulders and grinned,

then stared over into the chasm as if considering something. Finally he turned and said:

"It will soon be dark. I think that it is best to get your bronze out of its locker and carry it over there to the top of the descent while we can see. It's not easy walking, even in daylight."

A moment's reflection showed me that it would be as safe there as in the van, for if customs guards came upon us in this road which began nowhere and ended nowhere their suspicions would be sufficiently aroused to cause them to turn everything inside out. So I at once agreed to the removal and together we went to the car and brought the bronze from the place where it had traveled such a long distance. The giant and Il Gufo conferred and decided that considerable portions of the crating could be removed to lighten the load, and after that was done we carried the heavy burden away, with Il Gufo in the lead.

When Gigi had said the road to the descent wasn't easy, he had but half stated the truth. It was more than difficult. We had to hoist the bronze over the tops of upheaved rocks, lower it down the opposite sides, and twist and turn through narrow clefts between ramparts of stone. Sometimes we walked over smaller, rounded boulders that twisted beneath one's feet.

Also, when he said it was but forty or fifty yards he had underestimated the distance by at least a hundred. Despite there being enough of us to put the crate over almost any obstacle, I was glad when Il Gufo pointed to a dense screen of bushes that cut off the view of the gorge and said:

"Put it down there. I'll go back and get the rope with which my blankets were bound. It will make it easier to lower over the edge. It's going to be no light job to move that thing safely down to the bottom. Much easier to get it up on the other side."

Throughout this time Miss Blake scrambled over rocks and pitfalls with as sure a foot as any mountaineer might have shown, and once I saw Gigi watching her with undisguised admiration. Old Mario was apparently as proud of her as if every move of hers confirmed his right to introduce her into the best smuggling society. Personally, I hadn't yet altogether forgiven him. I wished her safely out of it, and would be enormously relieved when it was over with. The successful running of the antique across the frontier had been subordinated in my anxieties to concern for her.

Darkness had crawled upon us imperceptibly while we worked, and by the time Il Gufo had returned with the rope and, with something akin to a sailor's deftness with knots and lashings, had fixed the crate to his satisfaction, we found ourselves working under the pale light of the dying moon. Mario, Giuseppe and I had been assisting him, and were startled when we heard Miss Blake's voice.

"If you have finished with that," she said, "come this way. Gigi and I have got supper ready, and I'm as hungry as Gargantua."

We turned to follow her lead, and, coming around a mass of high boulders, saw in a tiny hollow, scarcely twenty yards across, a discreet camp fire over which the giant, squatted down, was nursing pots, pans and skillets from which was disseminated a combined set of smells that not only spurred one's appetite, but reminded him that the chef was Italian in taste.

But we enjoyed that meal; and one of my memories—why should that stand out in the mind of one who has known a thousand camps?—is that of the little flickering reflections on the surfaces of the huge boulders surrounding that cove and screening it from the sight of any outside its circle. There was one big, gnarled old pine that had been born and

had survived in some deposit of earth and bent across above a high boulder as if peering down upon us and marveling at our presence in such a sterile place. Almost beneath it Miss Blake lounged at full length, her slender body in its mannish garb and mountain boots stretched carelessly, resting on an elbow and with the firelight dancing over her firm but not unbeautiful face, and glinting from her eyes as she gave her attention to one and then another who talked quietly of our enterprise.

Not far from her, and always with that fixed stare of almost doglike affection, sat old Mario, nursing his knees. On the other side of the fire Il Gufo perched on a small boulder, smoking and commenting to Gigi, who squatted like that extraordinary statue of Rodin's, "The Thinker," with a huge arm and elbow propping up his head and chin. There was something very dominant about that man. He looked as if, in an emergency, he could command—looked as if he were a throwback to ancient sires accustomed to leadership. He seemed to be in a thoughtful mood, and merely nodded his head now and then, when Il Gufo spoke. Giuseppe sat near me, now and then taking a small part in the conversation, which was restrained strictly to bare audibility.

And thus, sitting around the tiny camp fire, we formed a circle about it, and waited for the moon to drop behind the hills so that we might with safety finish our illegal endeavor.

I had dropped into a meditative review of all that had happened since that now distant day when Giuseppe had approached me in the fussy little tram returning from Pompeii, and of what distinct and marked changes that meeting had made in my aspirations and plans. I was considering Miss Blake and the great part she had played in it all, the illuminating part, the insidious but constantly growing hold she had gained over our affections, when I saw

Il Gufo look up, and start, as if his hearing was more acute than ours. Then Mario dropped his hold of his knees and came to the crouching attitude of a wild animal alarmed and ready to spring, just as a voice almost over my head, and across the top of a high boulder, commanded, in the unmistakable Neapolitan *dialetto*:

"Put your hands up—and don't make a move, or I'll shoot you to hell before you can whisper!"

Startled at first, dismayed lest the customs were upon us, and then angry, we all sprang to our feet and looked upward. And there, instantly recognizable to all of us, save Gigi and Il Gufo, was that Neapolitan thug who had first robbed us, then been robbed in turn by old Mario and Miss Blake. The giant let out a hoarse roar of rage; and I saw the eyes of the Neapolitan fix upon him and the muzzle of the pistol shift to cover him who was presumably regarded as the most dangerous man. And in that very instant across my line of vision there swept a flash like a segment of steel lightning, and simultaneously the pistol was fired. I whirled and saw old Mario with his arm still outstretched in the attitude he had taken when throwing his dagger, but now slowly sagging to his knees.

"I told you my knife would get you," he cried, "and it has, you dog!"

And then, from three sides, there came tumbling down upon us seven others. One leaped toward Miss Blake, and him I shot. He reeled and a knife from his hand clattered on the rocks. I heard an oath behind me and whirled just in time to avoid a blow from a section of lead pipe. I grappled with the fellow, and as we wove to and fro, I found myself in the clutches of the hardest, wiriest, most dangerous gouger and garroter whom I had ever fought. Suddenly he relaxed in my arms, and with queer, sobbing sounds fell to the ground. I saw that old Mario had

crawled to the knife and risen to his knees to give my assailant his death blow.

On the other side of me I heard cries in that general confusion and saw the giant swing a man high aloft and send him crashing headfirst against a boulder. And even in the pale light of fire, moon and stars, the sight of that man's death was not one likely to be forgotten. It was horrible! Gigi leaped like a cougar upon a man whom Il Gufo was holding at bay with a swiftly slashing knife, caught the fellow from behind, and in an instant I heard the dull breaking of his neck as his head was twisted backward and sidewise. Il Gufo had been assailed by two men; but now, when the odds were equal, he crouched low and with a movement so swift that I could scarcely follow it—for it seemed to me that his knife swept from the ground upward—killed his man.

It all happened so swiftly that it seemed to me incredible when I saw the two others suddenly break into flight, and found myself staring about me. There were five dead men on the ground. I saw Giuseppe lying with his head almost in the camp fire, and I leaped and dragged him away from it. He came to consciousness as I did so, and began to wipe the blood from his face as I cried: "Giuseppe! Giuseppe. Are you badly hurt?"

"That dog with a lead pipe——" he muttered, sitting up.

Il Gufo was snarling through his teeth.

"Quickly! Quickly! The guard will be on us in a moment! They must have heard the shooting. We must get away!"

"*Per Dios!* Yes!" Gigi exclaimed. "Bring that girl and come!"

And then I saw him run across to the Sleeping Hercules, seize the ropes, and with his enormous strength whirl it upward and across his back, and plunge into the brush. Weight for two men

that it was, he handled it as if it were barely an impediment, and in a moment was gone.

Il Gufo had jumped across to where Miss Blake was bending above old Mario, and caught her by the arm.

"Come! Come!" he snapped. "You must come with me! You must! We've not a moment—not a second—to lose."

"But—Mario!" she remonstrated.

"I'll stay with him and Giuseppe. I'll look after them!" I declared. "Go with Il Gufo, as he tells you! Don't you see that you, Il Gufo and Gigi are the only ones who can't account for yourselves? Please—please—for the sake of all as well as yourself, go and try to get away!"

"Yes, yes! You must! I, too, implore you," Mario called in a voice that sounded weak and far away.

I caught her by the arm and half lifted her to her feet. She tore loose, dropped to her knees and kissed Mario, then sprang up, called something to me that I could not catch but which I think was an appeal not to leave Mario no matter what happened, and she and Il Gufo ran across that shambles. Again I heard the tearing of brush, and then the sound abruptly ceased and there was silence. From some distance away I heard shouts, but heedless of them knelt down and got Mario's grizzled old head and shoulders up to my knees and spoke to him. Giuseppe came staggering across and bent above him on the other side, and caught one of his hands. He was sobbing as if, now that it had come to this, his heart was being torn for the man he probably loved best of any in the world.

"There, there, Giuseppe. My fault," Mario said. "I thought I had frightened that rat-faced pup in Naples so he would never bother us again. All my fault. But, although he's got me, I know I got him! You'll find the dog's body on top of, or behind, that big rock, with my knife through his throat.

If the others get the Hercules across the border, you two can have my share. I'm finishing. Didn't expect it to come this way—after I'd given up all that sort of thing and gone to work with you, Giuseppe. Miss Blake—if only she escapes. My fault. But there's no one like her. Listen! Some one shouting. If only they don't catch Miss——"

His voice had been dying away until some of his words were inaudible; and now he gave a long sigh, and twitched convulsively, as if that brave soul of his was loath to leave his bullet-torn body until he was assured of the girl's safety. I felt for his heart, and gently lowered him to the ground. Giuseppe laid the relaxed hand across Mario's breast, then dropped to his knees and began pattering prayers for the dying. Almost in a daze I went to see if life remained in any of those others, but as I moved from one to another there was no need to doubt that they had come this long distance only to keep a rendezvous with death. I crawled up over the high boulder with my pistol in my hand; and I am afraid that had that rat-faced man who had killed Mario been alive, I would have completed Mario's unfinished work, for my heart thirsted for vengeance. There was no need. He must have been dying as he rolled off the boulder, for he lay in a crumpled, dead heap behind it.

And then it seemed to me that from all sides men were plunging toward us, and as I regained Giuseppe's side uniformed guards with carbines in hand came swiftly inward demanding to know who we were and what had happened.

CHAPTER X.

A CALL TO MUNICH.

FOR an entire week we were detained in a tiny little village in the tops of those rugged, picturesque mountains. Our story was simple, and all our per-

mits, licenses, and so forth bore out our statement that I was on a geological expedition and that Mario and Giuseppe had been in my employ; that we had gone to that isolated place to camp and explore, and had been attacked by brigands of whom we knew nothing. Possibly our statements were received with reservations, until the police investigators learned that two of the dead men were wanted in a dozen places in northern Italy, that against another was a charge of murder, and that those from Naples were old offenders of the worst type.

While these inquiries were under way there came from Gigi and his garage man in Udine a wild and indignant howl for a car they claimed had been stolen. The presence of the second car was thus accounted for on the supposition that the dead bandits had purloined it to follow us.

Giuseppe and I were the sole mourners who stood beside the grave when that loyal, if terrible, old man, Mario, was laid away. Some day I shall have his body transferred from those chill, formidable mountains to that land of sun and warmth from which he came. I can't feel that he sleeps well so far from the soil he loved, nor can I believe that I ever fully appreciated him until that courageous, unselfish, uncomplicating end of his—there in that bleak place in the gloom of a tragic night.

It was but a day or two later when the giant came to recover his "stolen" car. He pretended a bare acquaintance with us until we found an opportunity to be alone, and it was there by Mario's grave, whither we went, that we learned what had befallen the others and the Sleeping Hercules after they left us. For some minutes Gigi stood with grief-clouded eyes, staring at the fresh mound, before he spoke. Then he cried:

"That bronze—damn the thing! It's unlucky! The life of this man who lies

here at our feet was worth all such junk that ever was buried by a volcano. I'd have had nothing to do with it but for him, and if it brought ten million lire I'd touch none of them. This was my friend!"

And it didn't appear strange to me that he, this brigand, smuggler, slayer, bent over and, with silently moving lips, devoutly crossed himself. He replaced his hat on his head and walked away to the rude wall surrounding the bleak little cemetery, and for a moment stood with his hand resting on a moss-garbed stone before he spoke.

"I forgot," he said, "that you two don't know what happened to us. Well, after we left you, in all that excitement up there, it seems certain that the guards never suspected that your party wasn't complete. We weren't molested." He stopped and frowned absently off into the distance; and then suddenly chuckled, as if his recollection of the episode had a lighter side.

"*Per Bacco!*" he said in a tone of admiration, "but that Signorina Blake is *una brava!* She had no fear. The only matters that seemed to worry her were what we had left behind—Mario and you two. Il Gufo is a handy man on his feet in the mountains—quick, cool, certain; but she beats him. That bronze was heavy. She wanted to help me carry the cursed thing after we got to the bottom. Actually, she did! But it was a one-man job. A job for such as I, with a bullock's brawn and a bullock's head. Yet I was done in, stumbling, falling now and then before we got that thing to safety. Once I fell flat with it on top of me, and they had to lift it off before I could get up again.

"I was finished when we got it to a friend's farmhouse over there in Austria, and so was Il Gufo. But *she* would have turned back to rejoin you, if we hadn't made her see that it would make it dangerous for you two—perhaps upset everything. There wasn't a tear

came from her eyes until then—when she had to give up—and that tear was for Mario. May all the saints keep her from ever getting into such a mix-up again!"

Most fervently I thought the same.

"Where is she now?" I asked.

"God knows!" he replied. "I left her with Il Gufo, who promised to look after her. I had, of course, to make my way back at once to Udine. But she'll be safe with him. And that damned bronze—it's safe, too. It's across the border."

I wasn't thinking of the bronze when we made our way back to the village, where we were to part from Gigi, who, for obvious reasons, could but take his recovered car and drive away. I was concerned for Miss Blake's welfare until we reached the little inn where Giuseppe and I stopped. There I found a letter awaiting me, written with a lead pencil on coarse paper and in evident haste:

Tama has come and brought all the news he could learn. My uncle is coming to meet me at Spittal. Gigi will have seen or written you before this and Il Gufo says you are certain to return to Naples. He is a wonderful man. So wait for word from us in Naples. I can't seem to care, very much, what happens now, because I can't forget our Mario.

I read that over again. "Our Mario." Yes, he was "ours," all right.

For a few days longer Giuseppe and I were held, in the hope that the two missing bandits could be apprehended. But they made their escape. In the meantime we expected to hear of the discovery of the motor cycles, but they were either so well concealed that they were never found, or whoever got them decided that "findings are keepings," and profited thereby. Giuseppe learned, a long time afterward, that the two men who fled rode away on theirs, and, incidentally, learned of other matters which had puzzled us—learned in a peculiar way!

One of the bandits was given penal servitude for life. He sent for Giuseppe and for a thousand lire sold the information. It proved that old Mario had vastly underestimated the rat-faced man's courage and resource, as well as the lasting quality of his hatred when bested. He had returned to Giuseppe's house and was actually hidden in the cellar when Mr. Barnes proffered a hundred thousand dollars for the bronze if delivered outside of Italy. With cupidity as a lever he induced the villainous padrone of the Bene Fratelli to finance a second theft, they enlisted other thugs in the enterprise, and from then onward we were never free from espionage and pursuit.

Included in their gang were two Northern crooks who knew that frontier as none but the hunted ever learn to know a country. They had considered the holdup easy, being unaware of our reinforcement by the giant and his lieutenant until the final scene. Even in that last moment they had foolishly depended upon superiority in numbers and the belief that we, no more than they, dared use firearms lest we bring the frontier guards upon us. That first shot fired by the rat-faced man in the convulsion of his death throes had rendered them as desperate as it had us. They were to learn that in a battle with such skilled, veteran slayers as Mario, Il Gufo and Gigi—men with such chill courage and desperate resources—they, the Neapolitan city thugs, had not a chance. Their idea had been to avoid murder, while the sole object of the others had been to inflict death.

They had not, the confessing bandit admitted, even anticipated any serious resistance; but had believed that we would surrender the bronze, after which they would, with the help of their two Northern men, swiftly hurry it across the border and afterward themselves negotiate it for a big price and divide their loot. If Gufo's stratagems upon leaving

the road had baffled them for but a few hours, and the two familiar with that frontier had immediately surmised where we could be again overtaken, and had gone there direct.

Well, a week after Gigi's departure the official and final investigations were concluded, and Giuseppe and I were given leave to take our car and go wherever we would. We drove away with sad memories. There was no grizzled old man seated with us now. Our long silences were unbroken by his occasional terse comments, his occasional growls, or deep chuckles when something amused him. So to us that converted van was too laden with sad memories to be long endurable, and we sold it to the first bidder in the first big town, and returned to Naples by rail.

It was nearly two weeks later when I received a telegram from Mr. Barnes asking me to come to Munich. There was nothing explanatory, merely the terse command of a man accustomed to having his own way. Neither Giuseppe nor I had ever mentioned further excavation. Neither of us, somehow, had the heart, and I know not if either of us will ever again strike spade or mattock into that buried storehouse. So now I sent for him, and he came to me from Pompeii where he had resumed work. When I showed him the telegram he seemed to brighten.

"I hope it means that the Signore Barnes is satisfied and will pay," he said, "for I am tired. Also, I feel that I am getting old. I—I miss my friend Mario. Things aren't the same with me. Signore Roberto, that is the first time in my life that I ever broke the law, and, although it is late, I feel some shame. I shall not do so again. I am going to leave the whole end of it, the settlements, everything, to you; and what you do will satisfy me. I need money. Money means security and rest for me; but I wish I could forget it. We had to pay too much for anything

we shall get. If I had Mario back I would——"

So alone I went to Munich and drove to one of those quiet hotels which look out upon the serenity and beauty of that glorious park, called the Englisher Garten—a misnomer, because it was the creation of a man born and reared in Connecticut. I was immediately ushered up to Mr. Barnes' suite. His greeting was cordial but grave. He spoke without the elation I had expected from one of his kind who has fought battles without counting cost or prize, and merely for victory.

"The Sleeping Hercules will be landing in America just about now," he said. "I left it to that old chap you called the Owl. Yes, I left it to him to recover it, pack it and ship it. Tried to pay him something, but he refused it. All he asked was his expenses, and the little I got him to accept above that sum, he took with obvious reluctance. Queer fellow."

He sat as if musing, until I said: "Well, sir, your ambition should be satisfied. You own one of the rarest of antiques—perhaps the finest of its kind in the world."

"True," he replied, "true. It is worth all and more than I agreed to pay for it. I have drawn a check payable to you, knowing that you will attend to the just divisions."

From his pocket he took the slip of valuable paper and gave it to me; but I held it without feeling any thrill, almost listlessly. I wasn't aware that he had discerned my attitude, or that he had been observing me until he said:

"You don't seem too happy over it, Hall. Why? I know from other sources that your latest project has hung fire, and your share of that money should, under such circumstances, be very acceptable."

"The money itself—yes; but somehow I can't quite forget what it cost, and how it has been earned. It's not

only that it cost the life of a friend, but it——"

For quite a little time he regarded me before he said softly: "Conscience bothering you?"

"You've put your finger on the sore spot," I admitted. "Mr. Barnes, I've done a good many things in my time, some of which weren't called lawful, and perhaps I haven't always been too scrupulous, but I've just woke up to the cold fact that robbing a government is merely one form of thievery. And I'm not going to do it again, lest I get into the habit of thieving, and eventually fail to discriminate between a government and an individual. I'll tell you honestly, that I feel that I could get along without my share of this, although with Giuseppe it's a different matter. To him, half of this means much more than you can appreciate."

And then I told him what Giuseppe had said, and how he was growing old, and was poor, and a man without much hope for future ease. While I was talking he got up and walked to the doorway that opened onto a hanging balcony, and with hands in pockets stood there, half turned from me, although plainly listening. For a time he seemed to be considering something, and took a few steps backward and forward in the room with his hands still in his pockets and his eyes fixed on the floor. I was disappointed in that what I had said of Giuseppe and my own sore compunctions seemed to have left no impression on him, when he spoke as if the entire subject was done with and dismissed from his concern.

"What are you going to do now? Any plans?" he asked, halting and regarding me with a peculiarly searching, appraising look.

"None save that I shall return to Naples and try to pick up lost threads in the scheme I had on hand—something which I am certain is promising, but requires capital and backing."

"Yes, yes," he said. "I know all about that. One of the men you approached, a close friend of mine, told me of it. But, see here! I like all that I've ever known of you. And there are those who speak well of you. I think that about all I have needed to have a good esteem, untarnished, you have said since you came into this room. I, too, now that I am getting old, have begun to develop a conscience. Not that I haven't conducted a few robberies and raids myself; but like you, I'm through with anything of the sort. And I'm sorry that I tempted you into this last affair.

"Furthermore, now that it's too late to be undone, I've come to the decision, since we've been talking, that the Sleeping Hercules goes to no museum. I love such things, as you know, and I'm going to keep that bronze. But in my will there shall be a clause that upon my death it shall be restored to Italy. I am merely borrowing it for my lifetime. And I tell you this that you may not feel too badly over the acceptance of your share of that check. So that matter is concluded."

I was glad for his determination, and did feel somewhat less a thief, but was happier on Giuseppe's account than on my own when, saying, "Very well, sir. I suppose there is nothing else to be done about it," I put the check into my pocketbook.

I stood up to go, feeling that I had been dismissed, when he held me with, "Just a minute more, Hall."

Then, as if still thoughtful but having come to some decision, he moved out to the balcony and, leaning over the rail with hands clasped in front of him, he said: "I don't care what you do with your share of that money. If your conscience still hurts, you can give it to Giuseppe, or give some to that big fellow, or to the one they call the Owl. I don't give a damn what you do with it! But there's another matter. You've had

a mighty strong advocate at work on me, and I've got a pretty large undertaking on hand that requires youth, strength, and a man. I think you'll fill the bill. It will take you into Brazil for at least a year. At the end of that time, if you make good, I shall like to see you, and—welcome you. This advocate of yours is about the only person on earth I can't resist. She's had enough adventure now to last her a lifetime. She's had enough. To gain that conclusion makes what this has cost me seem cheap. Look here!"

He straightened up, caught my arm with one hand, and with the other pointed downward into the park. "That

is she—sitting there on the bench beneath those three big trees close together. I told her to go out there, and to stay there until I could decide upon what answer I might give her—whether or not I could agree to yield upon a certain point with which she surprised me; left me feeling strangely old; sort of pushed aside. As usual, I seem to have yielded, in that—that I've taken you up and am giving you your chance. I ask you not to fail her, or me. And there must be that proof of worth in the forthcoming year of work. I give you the privilege of carrying to her my answer. Go now, before I regret and change my mind!"

The Novel in the Next Issue—September 7th

THE SUN DANCERS

By CLAY PERRY

A vivid story of the desperate adventure of two young elopers in the mountain forests

HOW TO RUN A BUSINESS

FULLER E. CALLAWAY, millionaire and cotton-mill magnate, died recently in his fifty-eighth year at Lagrange, Georgia. He was the man whom Ida M. Tarbell once asked: "And what do you do at Lagrange, Mr. Callaway?" To which he replied: "We make American citizens at Lagrange, madam, and run cotton mills to do it with."

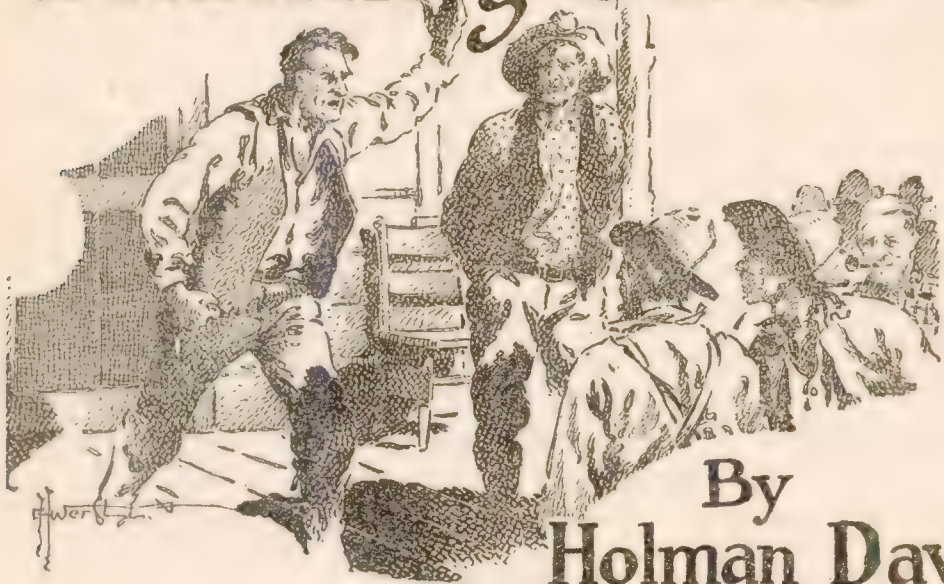
That reply is a faultless description of how to run a business. Fuller Callaway never had any trouble with his help, because he took such good care of them in wages and in every other respect that they never had cause to complain.

Men who can handle employees that way are the great men of industry. They do, in fact, "make American citizens" and run mills and factories with them. They preserve the employee's health, happiness, and dignity. They foster his ambition. They elevate his citizenship. The time when the worker could be driven under whip and spur is past. He knows what he needs and wants, and he usually turns to the employer who can give it to him. And by the same token, the employer who does most to make the employee contented and prosperous gets the biggest results from his workers.

Callaway was the fourteenth child in a poor Baptist preacher's family of seventeen; and without "pull" or the help of rich friends, he made his way from the bottom to the top in his old home town, starting with nothing and ending as the owner of a vast chain of industrial enterprises.

POP—5B

Snaffling Stola



By
Holman Day

Author of "The Crisis on Caskeag," Etc.

Stola, a little mountain village, was a law unto itself, and when Warden Bowen, with youth's rash sincerity, decided to put the fear of established law into the inhabitants, he was up against a tough proposition.

A COMPLETE STORY

H EADING home after his weekly tour of duty as fire patrol warden in the Margass Mountains, Tonus Bowen reined his horse aside into the deep crease of a grassy valley and located the roan colt. Foaled with a temper as variegated as its hide! Too tricky for the difficult hill trails. Tonus had been using his sure-footed, steady-going "chunk" and had let the roan run to pasture for weeks.

Sighted, the roan flung up its impudent head, eyed Bowen's mount and snorted equine scorn at a horse which tamely allowed a man to straddle its backbone and save his legs.

The warden smiled at this disdain. The roan, as the master foresaw con-

tingencies, would be doing some toting of his own on the morrow, making a long jaunt, snapping hoofs in a gallop such as an awkward hill horse could not manage.

However, Tonus now proceeded to get as much speed as possible out of his clumsy carrier, in a chase around the valley, and was finally able to maneuver the roan into a ledge-hemmed cul-de-sac. The penned animal reared and made furious passes with forehoofs. Dismounting, handling a coil of rope, Tonus watched his chance and tossed a slip noose over one of the upraised legs. The roan leaped frantically and tripped himself.

Then the master sat on the brute's

head and arranged hoppers which gave the legs play enough for a sedate gait but penalized unseemly antics. After the roan had risen, had lunged and had fallen several times, knocking his bruised sides against rocks, he arrived at an understanding of his limitations.

He struggled to his feet, hung down his head and rolled up red eyes in angry reproach when the hill chunk whinnied horse laughter; then the roan allowed himself to be towed along at a slow pace and was wise enough to give over making a spectacle of himself by resistance which meant tumbles.

At the foot of a pitch across which zigzagged a trail, the village of Stola sprawled between densely wooded mountain walls.

An isolated community, a deliberately recluse settlement, well satisfied with its own ways and methods, jealous of a peculiar liberty which it claimed for itself!

Jerry Bowen, pioneer, grandfather of Tonus, had promulgated the code of freedom on which Stola now insisted. And Judd Bowen, father of Tonus, had inflexibly upheld the code and had been tacitly honored and obeyed as the one having the say. Nonconformity with established law—disregard of courts and officers—such an attribute formed the backbone of the Stola insistence on a "leave-us-alone" policy. Both Jerry and Judd were under the sod in the little valley where the mountain streams had heaped silt enough to furnish earth for burial of the Old Sirs and their womenfolk.

But as to Tonus Bowen, sole living male of the line, the hidebound oldsters of Stola were dubious. They grumbled behind his back. He was not declaring for Stola's arrogated privileges as a Bowen should. It was felt that he had lowered himself by taking a State job as warden—doing work which had something to do with the law. Stola had always administered its own law

for itself, had settled its disputes, had punished offenders according to a system which seemed good. Stola did not understand Tonus very well, anyway. The young man was typically woodsman, mostly silent, always sententious when he did lower his shoulder of aloofness and accord a reply. But he never answered questions regarding his attitude as heir of the Bowen traditions. In that respect he was dumb.

When he was discussed, out of his hearing, Stola cackled ironical mirth and jeered that Tonus' stepmother, though she had diluted blood of the Mellicite Indians in her, was really more of a Bowen than her stepson was. At any rate, so it was agreed, Xylpha stuck stoutly for all that Stola claimed for itself, was fighting all the time against any breaking down of the old code, was properly and furiously antagonistic to outsiders and their meddling.

Tonus rode through the village, nodding stiffly to those who called greetings.

He halted in front of the general store, on the outer wall of which a small, faded sign proclaimed "Post Office." So inconspicuous a heralding suggested timidity in confessing even that connection with the outside world.

The postmaster-storekeeper saved Tonus the trouble of dismounting.

"I've give your mail to your mother, Tone! She come and asked for it."

When the young man rode on his way, his sun-browned face was ridged with grim lines. For weeks his homecomings had been unpleasant experiences; he was guessing that his arrival this day would put the torch to tinder.

The Bowen buildings, house and barns, were rather pretentious, and ledges boosted them into a commanding position.

Xylpha came out and stood on the porch, looking down on Tonus when he skirted the base of the ledges, teaming

the horses toward a paddock, the fence of which inclosed grassland.

He flourished a gesture of greeting; he did not speak.

She hurried down to the paddock gate while he was stripping the bridle from the chunk and removing the hobbles from the roan.

"Here's two letters for you," she announced in harsh tones.

He did not answer or turn his attention from the task he was on.

Her voice, with timbre of rat-tail file on metal, revealed spleen more bitter than mere rebuke of apparent inattention when she said further:

"On the outside it says these letters are from the high sheriff of the county."

Over his shoulder Tonus inquired lazily, casually:

"What does it say on the *inside*?"

"How've I any way of knowing?"

"By steaming the stickum—your usual way," he said indifferently but with conviction.

She made a ball of the missives and threw the pellet at him when he came toward the gate to receive his mail.

He swept the ball into his palm with the motion of one capturing an insect. He felt weight besides that of mere paper. He tore the end from a manila envelope and jogged into his palm a miniature carton of heavy cardboard. From the carton he extracted a silver badge inscribed "Deputy Sheriff." He ran his eyes over the letter accompanying.

Then he looked squarely, steadily, in challenge, at the woman beside the gate.

"I'm glad Sheriff Dunn mailed it."

"Glad, hey? To get *that*?" It was a feline snarl.

"Yes, glad! It saves me the long ride to the county seat. That's the reason I brought down the roan—thought I'd have to go and be sworn by the sheriff. But the postmaster's a notary and the letter says he can swear me.

I'll go now and tend to the due and legal cussing." Vaulting easily, he cleared the paddock rail.

"Just you wait a minute," she commanded when he started away; she was following him.

"I've read them letters from Sheriff Dave Dunn, seeing you're bound to have it as how I done it," she declared defiantly. "I've been a-guessing—and I've went and made sure. What he writes tells the story. You didn't have to be coaxed to be a deputy sheriff for this place."

He had halted at her call and was walking back toward her.

"No," he admitted quietly, "I slipped word to Sheriff Dunn—told him it was high time Stola has a deputy sheriff. He asked me to take the job. I've taken it. How comes it, it's any affair of yours?"

"It's my business because I've been the wife of your father, him that was Judd Bowen. I ain't going to put him to the bother of breaking out of his grave up yender to come down and hoss-whip the last Bowen for trompling on the biggest right Stola has claimed for itself, to do by itself. A Bowen doing that—of all men!"

"A Bowen is the man to do it—considering what has been happening here in these times."

"Happenings has been tended to—our own style," she insisted, the temper of a virago taking bits of control in its teeth. "Now the job o' reckonin' with you has been heaved onto my shoulders, so I'm jedging, but I'm able to lug it. Think twice, Tone Bowen, afore you take that oath and pin on that devilish sign of how you've sold us out to be hectored by courts and lawyers."

His composure unruffled, he pinned the badge on the outside of his jacket and started away.

From under her shawl she pulled a short staff around which was coiled a ten-foot length of braided rawhide.

Behind his back he heard the warning hiss when she slashed the air, freeing the coils.

Moved by muscles like steel springs he snapped around and caught across his hand the lash when she struck at him; he yanked the staff from her clutch, broke it in twain between hands raised above his head, and wound the rawhide about his waist while he surveyed her with narrowed eyes. Quietly he said:

"Are you forgetting I've grown up? I'd hate to think what I'd do even to a woman if she striped me with a whip. I ain't took a licking since I've been man size! Now, listen! You've been good to me in your own way since I was a little shaver. I've been glad to call you mother. But the business of the Bowens has always been tended to by the men Bowens themselves. Your place is in the house, tending to a woman's business. Go in and have my supper ready when I come back from taking the oath."

But the termagant was out of control.

"I'll go in, but it won't be to git vittles ready! I'll go to get something that's hotter'n vittles!" she screamed in the hysteria of her mania of assumed authority.

He left her and went on his way without comment or further commands. When he was in the rutted roadway, going toward the center of the settlement, she continued the arraignment in strident tones, her voice stirring echoes between the hemming hills. Out of houses came men and women to listen; they were apprised by the vociferous vixen that Tonus Bowen was shaming his family name, betraying his village to the law sharks, ready to drag his people to the county jail.

Men questioned him violently, angrily, when he paced along toward the post office. He kept his eyes to the front and made no reply.

The populace fell in behind and followed him.

Flanked and backed by the throng, Tonus confronted the postmaster who had been called out upon the store porch by the clamor. The young man tapped the badge on his breast. He pulled a paper from the manila envelope.

The postmaster came to the edge of the porch and took the paper from Bowen's hand.

"Jarvis, I've come to you as notary, to take an oath." Tonus spoke out so as to be heard by all. "By that writing Sheriff David Dunn has appointed me his deputy for this section."

"But we've never had a deputy sheriff up here," protested Jarvis, stammering. A queer smile twisted Bowen's lips. "We've got one now."

Bawled a voice in the crowd, hoarse, ireful:

"Stola don't need a sheriff!"

And another declared:

"What's more, we won't have one."

While the notary hesitated, Tonus did informally for himself, declaring in full tones:

"I swear to perform the duties of deputy sheriff without fear or favor." He drove his open hand in air as high as he could stretch his arm. "So help me God!"

A medley of threatening hoots and snarls followed his oath.

Agile as a cat, making a standing jump of it, he leaped upon the porch and faced his incensed townsmen.

"Folks, I'm making this all public, leaving no chance for guesswork. I'm not much of a talker, as you all know, but I may as well clean this thing up by some straight talk so you won't be bothering me later with questions. My father and my grandfather acted according to their lights——"

"And it has been up to you, as the last Bowen, to foller on in their tracks!" shouted a man, shoving

through the press, pounding his fists on the platform in front of Tonus. "You ain't been tending to things."

One other came forcing through the throng and was making more of a demonstration of violence than had the objector who preceded her. She took her cue from the man's declaration. The newcomer was Xylpha Bowen, now more bitterly jealous of family prestige.

"Yes, he has sneaked out o' tending to things, like the Bowens have been called on to do—like it has been agreed they ought to do," she raged. She brandished over her head a double-barreled shotgun. Everybody recognized it. Murmurs and mutterings signaled the recognition.

Xylpha went on implacably:

"Tone Bowen, can you look on this gun without being ashamed?"

"No," he admitted after a grimace of disgust.

"Huh! I thought it would wake you up to remembering the Bowens who was ahead of you."

"It hasn't needed the sight of that gun to wake me up, folks," he informed the crowd. "And I *am* ashamed when I look at it—not of myself but of how the Bowens before me have used it; ashamed of Stola because that gun was allowed to be used as it was in the old days. In these days it's time to have a new sense of real law and order and decency."

"With you as sheriff, hey?" the woman sneered.

"Yes."

"Going ahead to take orders from outsiders, hey?"

"The law of the land has come to Stola," he stated firmly, with pride. "And give me that gun, stepmother."

"I'll give you what's in it!" she shrieked, allowing full rein to her mania. "Like your father and your grandfather would have done to a renegade showing yaller! And too fresh you be! Take your salting!"

He fully understood this threat, but he did not tamely turn his back to take the punishment he had seen his father deal in the case of offenders.

Instead, recognizing the peril in her mind storm of the moment, and meeting the first test of the new régime at Stola, he leaped from the platform, crossing his forearms in front of his face to protect his eyes.

She discharged both barrels of the gun point-blank at his face and breast; an alley had been left clear for her by those who had flung themselves out of range. The hot blast of the charge was filled with midget missiles, birdshot, sand and rock salt. The exposed portions of his face were filled with the peppered pellets, blood oozed freely when he halted for a few moments, getting control of himself.

Then he lowered his arms and advanced on her, catching the butt of the gun and wresting the weapon from her grasp when she swung at him.

He gave them proof of his strength; there was, in the back of his head, a desire to impress them with that strength of a man newly set in their midst as an officer of the law of the land. With his hands he wrenched the wooden stock from the barrels and flung the parts far over the heads of the crowd.

"That's the end of that foolishness," he said, walking to the platform.

"Calling the good men before you out o' their names as fools, hey?" demanded a bystander. "Nice way for a Bowen to talk about his fambly!"

This was the man who had previously declared that Stola would not tolerate a deputy sheriff.

Tonus swung aside and faced the spokesman of rebellion.

"You are too reckless in laying your tongue on the Bowens, Cale Bawson!"

"How 'bout making the thing damn pussonal and telling you what all the rest here are thinking—as how you've

proved yourself a low-down traitor, taking a job that makes you a spy on your neighbors?" In fury, feeling that the others were backing him in a demonstration of public sentiment, the man reached out and tore the badge from the deputy's breast and shoved it deep in a trousers pocket.

"You'll be putting that back where you took it from—and right instant, Cale," commanded Tonus.

"Go to hell!" raged Bawson.

Here was even more crucial test than was the affair with the Bowen gun of penalty.

Tonus spoke without heat.

"You folks all know me—that I've kept clear of plug-ugly stuff. I've never shoved fist against a Stola man till now. But that badge has got to mean something in this place from this time on. Bawson, I'm speaking in the name of the county of Marcook when I tell you again to pin it back where you took it from."

"Clear a circle!" bawled the other, flourishing a gesture to those crowding about. "There's going to be a seeing of what's what!"

Instant obedience provided an arena.

The two were not unequally matched, though young Tonus was tall and the antagonist short and stocky.

"Mash him, Cale!" shrilled Xylpha. "Mash him soft enough so I can take him home and make him over into a real Bowen."

Bawson immediately struck out in the approved and usual fashion of fisticuffs.

Tonus met the lunge in the style which he had adopted that day in his other set-tos with violence; as he had caught the whiplash and the gun butt, so he snapped his steel clutch about the wrist of the arm which Cale shot forward.

With a flash of motion Tonus yanked down the arm and bent it backward behind Bawson, seized the other arm, drove it up and brought it down with

leverage against the fulcrum of the foe's neck at the base of the skull.

Tonus drove a pig squeal from his man when force was applied to the arm levers. Bawson tried to kick, but the young man hammered the other's feet with the heel of a heavy riding boot. Then he twisted his complaining captive to his knees on the ground.

"Now, Cale, I'll break one of your arms or both! But you're going to pin that badge back!"

"That ain't real fighting—that's only dirty work," derided a voice from the crowd.

Tonus did not trouble to defend his style; he leaned over the face of Bawson and twisted more forcefully while drops of crimson from shot wounds speckled the captive's grimacing countenance. "Cale, I mean business in this. Say you'll pin that badge back. Yell the promise loud enough for all the folks to hear. Else inside o' ten seconds you'll have a couple o' broken arms and you can't pin it back."

The suffering man yielded.

"I'll pin it back!" Bawson squalled, feeling that his agony presaged the crack of bones.

Tonus pulled the man upright and offered his breast while Bawson flexed and chafed his numbed arms until he could employ them in the promised service.

"And there it stays, reminding you all of the oath I have made," proclaimed the deputy sheriff, patting the restored badge with his palm. "Without fear or favor, remember."

One on the outskirts of the crowd ventured, revealing that revolt was still alive:

"No favor, hey? How about Xylpha Bowen? Does she get off scot-free, after shooting at a deputy sheriff?"

The stepmother hurried forward, swinging resolute arms, beating her way through the press.

"Arrest me, Tone Bowen, me that

has pot-walloped in the kitchen for you since you could chew vittles!"

He turned his back on her, left her still railing and went again upon the platform in front of the store.

"Starting in once more where I left off, I'm saying to you folks I'm going on without fear or favor. I'll include Xylpha Bowen. I'll take care of her case."

"You'll ram me into jail—that's your threat, of course. You'd best do it. If I stay in our home I'll give you no peace night or day while you're there. It has fell onto my shoulders to speak and act for the Bowens dead and gone. I'll rake you till you come to your senses."

Tonus' voice overrode hers in power.

"Men and women, I *have* come to my senses. That fact seems to be making the trouble we're having here today. The law must handle things in Stola from this time on. There has been our own system, you say. But by that system, picking on people for punishment, we have a dozen poor devils in this place penned up in homes because they have been driven crazy." He pointed to Xylpha who was mouthing shrill threats. "You have heard her threatening me with persecution. She and her kind among you women—you men, too—have taken on yourselves the work of punishing what you decide to be faults and offenses. The law is to be given out by wise men of the courts, not by prejudiced fools working out grudges. I'm not setting myself up over you. But I've been made the high sheriff's representative in this place, and I'll arrest any person, from now on, who breaks the written law."

He leaped down from the platform and walked through the crowd, passing close to Xylpha, giving no heed to her continued vociferation. She followed him, declaiming threats. Arrogating to herself the mantle of the Bowens, she had manifestly developed lunacy.

"Looks like there's going to be hell to pay hereabouts," remarked a citizen.

Jarvis stepped to the edge of the platform. He was a conscientious man, slow spoken, with a sense of justice—and he had been thinking.

"Folks, I do consid'able work for the United States of America. Stola might's well wake up and admit that Tone Bowen is more or less right in what he has said. We can't keep on like we've been doing. We have resisted drafts in times o' war, we've bucked against paying State and county taxes. There'll probably come a pinch when we'll be needing some other kind of law and action besides what we've been fixing up for ourselves. I'm glad Tone, so far as being a deputy sheriff goes, has hitched us onto the nation."

There were grunts and murmurs of approval here and there in the assemblage.

But others protested vigorously.

"I'm sorry to see a split and I'm hoping it don't mean that a lot of trouble is coming to Stola," Jarvis declared with anxiety. He wagged his head and went back into his store.

A man twisted his features tauntingly in front of Bawson's glowering visage.

"Guess if he wants any peace o' mind, Tone'll have to tie a few knots in Xylpha's tongue, like he done with your arms."

Bawson growled profanity and elbowed his way out of the throng.

Far along the road was Tonus, striding briskly toward home. The stepmother was following him.

An onlooker suggested maliciously:

"Looks like she was taking it on herself to be the Bowen conscience. Wonder how Tone will handle her!"

Bawson, tramping stolidly along the road, heard the remark and muttered:

"Reckon a man like me better keep his eyes on how he does handle her."

The spy knew what the Bowen tem-

der was, under spur. Bawson was hopping. His grudge was gnawing like a rat attacking a cupboard door.

Tonus halted at the paddock gate and made survey of the roan. The horse was pestering the inoffensive chunk, chasing the latter, biting, rearing and threatening with hoofs, whirling about and launching kicks at the hill horse. The performance suggested equine revenge because the chunk had been an ally in the roan's capture and removal from the free life and sweet grass of the valley.

Tonus leaped into the inclosure, calling sharp commands. He took with him a bridle that was hanging on a fence post. It was a headstall with a long rope. As he walked across the paddock he arranged a slip noose in the end of the rope. About his waist he was carrying the rawhide which he had snatched from his stepmother; he found a stick on the ground and attached the lash. He closed in on the defiant roan and snapped the whip, cracking the lash to intimidate the animal. The roan backed into a corner of the fence, at bay.

But immediately he leaped forward when a small rock bounced off his flank. Tonus narrowly escaped being borne down by the beast's rush.

Looking past the racing roan, the young man saw Xylpha beside the fence; out of her sagging apron she was taking another rock.

"Stepmother, I warn you. I'm at the limit of patience. I'll stand for no more of your crazy persecution. Go into the house. At once! Get my supper ready for me."

"It oughta be set out with Paris green in every mess o' vittles!" she taunted. "But a dead man couldn't arrest me. Go ahead, deputy sheriff, and arrest your mother!" The roan had halted, and she heaved another rock with sure aim and started the enraged animal off again in a gallop.

Bawson had swung around to the rear of the buildings by way of a gully and was surveying this scene with immense satisfaction, peering past a corner of the barn.

"It's working to the queen's taste," he commented.

Tonus ran to the fence, vaulted, tore the apron and its store of rocks from Xylpha's waist, then, holding her arm in firm grip, dragged her along toward the house.

She laughed shrilly.

"So I'm arrested by the new deputy sheriff!"

He did not reply. When she resisted he lifted her in his arms and carried her into the house. Confronting the frantic woman, when he had set her on her feet in the kitchen, he edged between teeth which had dammed back speech:

"It'll be bad if you bother me again while I'm doing my chores."

He ran back to the paddock.

Using the tactics he had employed in the ledgy niche of the valley, he noosed the foreleg of the rearing roan, mastered the animal and led him to the barn.

While Tonus was coming up the path, Bawson saw Xylpha stealing from the rear door of the ell. The spy ducked into the barn by way of the tie-up door and hid himself behind some horse blankets hanging from a wooden peg.

Tonus came along, tussling with the roan. The brute was more unruly than ever. The arch of the sky had been his stable roof for months, the open fields his range of action. He was fighting against confinement in a narrow stall. Outside the twilight was descending; within the barn the shadows were deep and the place seemed a dungeon after the full freedom of the open.

The horse spraddled its forelegs and balked completely when the master had managed to tug him halfway into a stall.

Then, in the alley behind the row of stalls, sounded Xylpha's strident voice.

"Keep back! Keep away!" shouted Tonus. "The devil is in this horse."

"Yeh! And the devil is with him, too, a-holding onto the bridle!" squalled the insensate virago. "Now I've got you penned where I can tell you what you are, Tone Bowen. And if I don't get sense and satisfaction out o' you, I'll be banging this hoss with a barn shovel and see if you don't get the come-uppance that's due you."

"Keep away from those hind hoofs!" yelled Tonus when the roan began to heave and strain, wrought into fresh excitement by the woman's provocative shrillness. Her tones promised approaching perils behind in the darkness.

The brute was a fighter and resolutely attacked the peril, backing with a surge which flung Tonus face down. His weight was ineffectual in anchoring the animal. The master was dragged out into the narrow alley and along the rough planking while the roan launched vicious kicks at that which threatened in the gloom.

Tonus was not able to see past the bulk of the horse nor to understand why the woman failed to escape. Either panic or mad persistence made her a victim. He heard a shriek and the impact of hoofs. He heard the thud of a heavy object on the planks of the alley.

Giving up the struggle to put the roan in a stall, he knotted the end of the rope around a ceiling prop and dove out through a manger's feeding opening, landing on his hands and knees on the barn floor; to pass the leaping roan in the alley was impossible.

He ran around behind the stalls, set hands on the prostrate victim and dragged her out to the broad opening of the barn's roll doors. She was dead. The twilight's glimmer revealed sufficient!

He leaped away, running toward the village to give out the word, his heart

full of the sorrow and horror of the affair.

Behind the blankets Bawson had heard, had sensed the tragedy. Making sure that Tonus had left the scene, the spy ventured forth and inspected what the faint light showed him at the roll doors. He muttered, he pondered, doubling his ear between finger and thumb. Then he went pawing in the gloom along the walls of the barn. He picked up various utensils and discarded them. When he came upon a beetle, a heavy wooden maul for stake driving, he carried it to the corpse and dragged the maul of the instrument through the stain that was now haloing the head; shuddering while he did it, he plucked gray hairs. The face of the beetle was frayed by battering and the interstices held fast the hairs when Bawson affixed them. He trotted on young Bowen's trail, as fast as his years would permit, toting the incriminating instrument at arm's length, gingerly.

For a few moments Bawson stood on the outside of the circle of men to whom Tonus was reporting in front of the Jarvis store.

"Get around me," whispered Bawson to the men nearest. "Don't let that hellion tackle me again. Accident, says he! The hell it is! He killed her. I saw it. I'm bringing proof." He brandished the beetle.

Then from out of the circle of the rampart defending him, Bawson made his charges, confessing frankly that he had followed Tonus and Xylpha to spy.

"I felt just the same as I knowed the rest o' ye was feeling, as how she'd torch him fair mad. And she done it. He turned and belted her stone dead with this beetle. Here, Jarvis, you take it and keep it careful. There's blood and hair on it."

"Bawson, you're a damnation liar!" raved Tonus. He was circling the hemming men, trying to get at the accuser, but was repulsed by sturdy arms. "I

have told the gospel truth. The roan kicked her and killed her."

Jarvis was inspecting the beetle, under the light cast by matches which men shielded with curved palms.

"That maul tells the story!" shouted Bawson. "Hoss' hoofs be damned! Deputy sheriff, you'd better arrest *yourself*, before the high sheriff gets here. I'm starting for the county seat to pass the word!"

He ran away into the night.

"Men, can you—do you believe that liar for one second? You know his grudge." Tonus was pleading in broken tones.

"But how did blood and gray hair come to be on this maul?" demanded one who had been inspecting.

"I don't know," confessed young Bowen. "But it would be like Bawson to put them there."

"Really don't seem," said Jarvis, calculatingly slow in accusing any man of the worst, "as if Cale had a big enough grudge to set a man's neck into the noose, by lying."

"But somebody else in these parts had a grudge in him big enough to drive him to a killing," declared an implacable foe to the order recently introduced by Tonus Bowen. "I ain't naming names, but that man's face is marked by the salting he got before our eyes an hour ago. And she was threatening to do worse to him!"

"I'm asking no favors, no honest belief in me from Stola!" Tonus shouted, goaded to righteous wrath. "I'm going to beat 'Liar' Bawson to the high sheriff of this county. I'll stay in jail till the law of the land speaks on this thing. Again I tell you all, the roan killed Xylpha Bowen. And I'll make that horse pay by running him to death, getting me to the county seat."

But even while he was declaring, his eyes were fixed on the western sky where a glow of dull crimson was spreading against the pall of night.

That illumination was a fire warden's summons to duty. It called Tonus into the west. The county seat was to the eastward of Stola.

Other men were joining the throng in front of the Jarvis store. Silence fell upon them when the fire warden leaped upon the platform, straining his eyes in an effort to get a better understanding of what the ominous glow might signify.

On the silence, after a time, a man spoke out:

"It's up the valley, that's plain enough. Seems like it might be in the Walpole cutting."

Another silence. Then Jarvis, who came out of his store after depositing the beetle in a safe place, asked:

"What's your idea of it, Warden Bowen?"

Tonus put away the horror of tragedy, the burden of accusation recently laid on him.

"I believe the fire *is* in the Walpole cutting. I was through there to-day. I don't have to tell you folks of the fight up there over stumpage rights. All is, I heard to-day that Junkins is fool enough to threaten he'll bring his gang over the horseback and burn out Pratt—mill, boarding house and all. I was intending to go back there to-morrow, with authority as a deputy sheriff. The trouble has been hatching a long time, as you know, and that was one of my reasons for wanting to be appointed by Sheriff Dunn."

"Wish you had said so before, Tone. But the Bowens have always been too close mouthed for their own good," remonstrated one of the crowd.

"And I don't believe Junkins is in the right or has contracts with the real heirs of the tract," affirmed another. This appeared to be the prevailing sentiment.

"I was going after Junkins, with power to serve an injunction," stated Tonus. "He's dangerous if he tries to back up the talk he has made. It's mostly black growth, all tinder, between

Walpole and here, up the valley. With the wind strong west as it is now, Stola is in for an awful scorching if that fire gets away into the tree crowns."

The tragedy at the Bowen home was out of their minds for the moment. There was doleful conference regarding the danger of Stola.

Upon that conference came a man, riding bareback on a pelting draft horse from a timber operation. He was yelling at the top of his voice. He was demanding whether Warden Bowen was in that crowd.

"I'm here!" called Tonus.

"Hustle to Walpole, warden! Junkins and his gang have come over the hossback from their cutting, all drunk and ugly. They're burning us out. Holding our crew back from tackling the fire! If it gets away and jumps into the throat of this valley, no one knows where this chimblly flue will take it to!"

"The chap is right, men, and Stola is in the flue," declared Tonus. "As fire warden, under the law, I'm drafting all able-bodied workers. Get shovels, axes and crosscut saws!"

He leaped from the platform and set hands, here and there, against the shoulders of men, urging them to prompt action. To several oldsters he gave commands:

"Go to the Bowen barn and stand guard over what you find there. Leave it as it lies till the sheriff and the coroner get along." He added, with irony: "We can be much obliged to Cale Bawson for his quick job in calling 'em here."

He turned to Jarvis.

"Come with your key and open up your dynamite magazine."

The trader kept his stock of explosives in a stoned-up pit in the hillside. Hurrying there, Tonus soon filled a sack with the cylinders of "canned thunder," secured caps and fuses.

Then he led his fire fighters at a lively clip up the valley. They went on foot

because horses, if scared by the fire which even then might be sweeping down the valley, would be more of hindrance than help.

Far along the gorge from Walpole, they met up with skirmishing outflankers of the conflagration—resinous trees that had been torched by brands flung and scattered by the wind. The trees in this area were small, the young growth left after a timber operation. The operators had also left dry slash, and fires were springing up in this tinder.

The warden set his men at work beating out these scattered danger breeders with the flat of their shovels. Men with crosscuts sawed the trunks of the small trees and dropped them, so as to get at the crown fires. From these elevated torches brands would be plucked by the wind and heaved along the valley to set flame to the big trees closely ranked along the slopes.

In the past Tonus had studied carefully the natural conditions existing in his far-flung range: As best he was able he had made advance plans to cope with emergencies.

Now, while his men toiled in smoke and heat, he ran for a short distance down the valley and climbed the slope, his sack of dynamite on his back. A lurid glow was smeared on the sky and lighted his way. He was seeking a shoulder of the slope where soil erosion had toppled trees in a dead tangle and had uncovered a gravel deposit.

At the foot of an overhanging mass of mingled rocks and soil he dug with his spade and placed a heavy charge. He timed his fuse, lighted it and fled to shelter up the valley. The earth-jarring shock was followed by the rumble and roar of the dislodged avalanche. The side of the slope was gashed deeply; it was a fire trench which should serve, he believed. Furthermore, rocks and gravel had been heaped upon the inflammable duff at the foot of the

slope and choked the throat of the gorge with a barricade behind which men could serve.

Tonus sent back several of his helpers to man the trench and wall and deal with the flying brands which might make sorties over the makeshift ram-parts.

His main force he led onward to the Walpole cutting, going intrepidly to the heart of this trouble.

All the buildings had been fired. The timbers were tumbling into the red jaws of pits when the warden reached the scene. Pratt and his men were grouped in the half shadows at the edge of the circle of fierce light.

They were cursing volubly while they gazed at the destruction and at men who were closer to the heat caldrons, braving the blistering blasts with the impunity of hell demons. The celebrators of ruin danced about, bellowed a woods chorus hoarsely, flourished cant dogs and clacked the ash staffs in crazy fencing matches.

"They set this fire, Warden Bowen," clamored Pratt ragefully. "They slammed in here, all drunk, and smashed my men right and left when we tried to stand 'em off. He's a liar saying my contracts ain't O. K.!"

Hearing the accusation, Junkins left his men and ran to the group, leaping across the Gargantuan shadows cast by his dancing crew.

"You listen to me, Warden Bowen! I hold Walpole stumpage contracts made with the real heirs, not the fake ones Pratt has dealt with. My rights will stand fire in court."

"But not this fire started in the heart of the black growth," declared Tonus sternly. "Pratt says the fire was set. My own opinion backs what he says. I've been hearing plenty about threats."

This remark did not mollify Junkins.

"It may have been said as how I'd take over my own property and drive out trespassers. If you want to see my

contracts——" He was dragging papers from his coat pocket.

Tonus put up his palm of protest.

"You can settle contract matters and rights in the court you've spoken of, Junkins. That's an affair for judges and lawyers, not for me. But what's happening here and now is my business. We'll hem in this fire. Then I'm asking you to go down to headquarters with me and clear this matter up before the commissioner."

"Not by a damn sight will I do. I've got a crew to keep busy."

"Yah!" jeered Pratt. "Busy burning my depot camps! That'll be your next job, so I'm told."

Liquor made Junkins reckless. Rage loosened his tongue.

"I'm making a clean sweep of a trespasser and I ain't afraid of the court of law under my contracts."

"Look here, Junkins," interposed the fire warden. "As I've told you, contracts mean nothing to me now. But this fire, putting timber in danger, and the possibility of more dirty work along the same line—it all means a lot to me in my job." He walked close to the instigator of violence and tapped his finger on the new badge pinned on the outside of his jacket. "Also, I have been appointed deputy sheriff for this section. I place you under arrest."

"What for?" demanded Junkins, irate and defiant in his guilt.

"You know devilish well what for." The officer reached his hand to take his prisoner, but Junkins dodged away and ran toward his men, bellowing warnings and commands. They massed around him in battle array, couching their cant dogs.

"Bowen, ain't you going to make him face me in court?" asked Pratt. "I'm going to accuse him of crime first, and I'll let the contract suits wait."

"You heard me serve notice of arrest. I don't need any suggestions about keeping on with my duty, Pratt."

The deputy sheriff turned to the men of Stola.

"This has become a riot in the meaning of the law. I summon you—swear you as my posse! Boys, I know how most of you have felt about the regular law. I'm one of you. I shall make allowances. If you buck now and don't serve as summoned, I shall not report to the high sheriff and ask penalties. I'll simply go ahead as best I can alone. I have arrested Paul Junkins and I'm going to take him out or be lugged out of here myself on a stretcher."

Men muttered in each other's ears. There was an understanding quickly effected. One spoke for all.

"Tone, Jarvis said a mouthful to-day. He has a lot o' good judgment. Said there'd come a time when we'd find we need the law o' the land. Guess we do need the kind you have showed up to us, your way. Grit and the help o' the Almighty has staved this p'tic'lar fire off'm Stola. Another one, if them Junkins drunks keep busy, will most prob'ly sweep us. We're seeing as how we need the real law. And we need you, too. Can't afford to let the Junkins gang do you up. You're backed now by law. And, by the blue-and-sizzling Tophet, this crowd from Stola is backing *you*! We're deputy sheriffs along with you. Give us our orders!"

A Bowen understood the full significance of that surrender of the old code!

Tonus twisted his neck, settling the lump which threatened to block the orders requested.

"Come on, boys! Give 'em the flats of the shovels. You've been having practice. It's only beating out another kind of a fire!"

One of the posse bit off a fresh chew of tobacco and settled it in his cheek.

"Too bad they ain't steadier on their feet," he complained, squinting a calculating size-up of the silhouettes tossing against the red flare. "Looks like it's going to be too easy."

This estimate, casual and careless, gave Pratt and his crowd new courage.

"We don't want you to take the whole brunt, warden. We'll go in with you."

"Many thanks, Pratt! But my regular posse can handle the business without help."

It was a tactful compliment—it was a final welding of allegiance. The manner of the Stola crowd answered for their new, proud zest in this adventure.

Tonus stepped out in advance of his little cohort. Past palms curved at his mouth, he shouted:

"This is a sheriff's posse, men, coming after Paul Junkins in the name o' the law! That warning is due to you in the way of fair treatment."

Their derisive hooting was the officer's signal for a charge.

The opponents did not wait for the shock of assault. They ran forward and lunged with cant dogs. But the broad rectangles of the shovel blades were effective shields against thrusts. And instantly, as soon as the aim of a cant dog was averted, its wielder got a smashing blow of a shovel against the side of the head. Here and there, as the battle went on, prostrate men squirmed and floundered on the ground.

"Have your men bring tarred rope and tie 'em up, Pratt, if you want to be of help!" Tonus shouted.

He had downed several antagonists and was advancing on Junkins, who had secured a pike pole and was at bay. He made furious thrusts at the young man when the latter circled for an opening. Then once again Tonus demonstrated the rapidity of his snap of clutch, catching the end of the steel-shod pole, pushing it high overhead and wresting it from the other's hands. He quickly closed it on his man, dropped him with a thrust backward against an upraised leg, leaped on the foe and secured his arms with a belt stripped from the captive's mackinaw.

Shortly the affair was over. Steadi-

ness and determination won against the false courage and frenzy of the drunken combatants.

The posse man who had complained that the job would be too easy munched his tobacco serenely while his deeply gouged hand was bound up by a friend. His sage comment, indorsed by the Samaritan, was:

"Beats all how big a stunt you can put over, fighting behind the back of the law instead of breaking it." Then with startling inappositeness, but out of his new estimate of the honest régime preached and practically exemplified for Stola, he snapped: "Hell! Tone never kilt that stepmother of his!"

In the friend there was a flash from the embers of the die-hard distrust of lawyers.

"He'll be a fool if he goes down and lets 'em try him in court. Stola can't afford to have a man like him took away from her."

There were qualms in others of the men of Stola when they looked on Tonus Bowen making his fire patrol of the premises and investigating the possibility of farther spread of the flames.

He answered the mental queries of his townsmen when he called them into a group away from listening ears of the outsiders.

"Boys, I'm asking you to stay on here and tend to the prisoners and make sure the fire doesn't get a new start. I've got business at the county seat. You all know what the business is. I've had to let it hang while I've tended to this thing up here."

"We'll be going into court to tell what we know about Xylpha's actions," affirmed a spokesman. "And trying not to speak no great harm of the dead and gone, at that!"

"I'll be sorry to have anything said in public about the inside of Stola's private business," stated Tonus with feeling. "I'm sorry I couldn't beat Liar Bawson to the sheriff. But I can get

down there and put my word against Cale's. I'm in a hurry, boys. Take care of things up here. Good night!" He leaped away into the shadows and started down the valley on the run.

He was slowed by the detritus which his blast had precipitated into the gorge. However, so his posted guards told him, his fire break had been their main help in stopping at that point the advance of the flames.

"All right! Go to Walpole now. The boys will tell you about the little social affair we've had. I can't spare the time. I'm on my way to the sheriff, you know!"

They shook their heads sadly and mumbled their melancholy comments after he had hurried away from them.

At midnight he stumbled along the roadway of Stola settlement, past the darkened houses. His muscles were sagging with weariness.

The glow of coals in pipe bowls revealed to him that the old men were keeping the death watch at the roll doors of the barn. He called to them from the shadows in order to reassure them regarding sounds they would be hearing in the barn. He went around and entered by the tie-up door, found the barn lantern on its peg and lighted it. In the alley behind the stalls he held the lantern in front of the staring eyes of the roan; the animal had not broken its tether.

There was instant challenge with crossing stares between the two, immediate defiance on the part of the horse.

Not with silly rage but with calculated intent to intimidate him into obedience to a master, Tonus drove his fist against the skull between the horse's eyes.

Reacting to threat according to wont, and as expected by Tonus, the roan flung himself backward to strike with forehoofs. But the studding was low and the animal's head crashed against a beam. Partly stunned, he fell upon

his knees, and the master straddled the roan's neck and bore the head down upon the planking. In that posture he held the animal minute after minute, dominating, driving into the equine mind the conviction that this biped with the strong arms and the grip like the pinch of a steel clamp was a match for the bulk of the brute.

"Want any help, Tone?" called one of the oldsters through a manger opening.

"No! I'm making this horse understand that one man can handle him. In a few minutes he's going to get up and carry me to the county seat."

"That'll be at the resk o' your life in a pitch-black night," was the remonstrance.

"Getting there with my story before they come after me; getting there soon enough to catch a liar at work, may save my neck from the noose," Tonus rejoined grimly. He pulled in the headstall rope which he had previously untied and set two slip loops over the roan's nose. Twisting his hand in the slack of the rope, tightening the rope vise as occasion required, the master permitted the animal to struggle upon its feet. The nooses served to subdue the horse when Tonus led his mount out through the tie-up door. Now requiring help which was not connected with mastery of the roan, Tonus asked two of the watchers to throw on a saddle and cinch it carefully.

"Waal," drawled one of the old men, when Tonus and the wildly galloping roan were smeared out by the darkness, "at the rate he's going he'll be either in hell or the shire in blasted quick order!"

The rider, doubled forward against the horse's neck, loosened the twist on the controlling loops, giving the nostrils full play. Guided merely, unchecked in gait, the roan raced along as if making desperate efforts to run out from beneath a hateful burden.

The distance between remote Stola and the county seat was a long stretch of many a mile.

Tonus at last was riding toward the crimson screen of the dawn before he crossed the town line of the county seat. The roan was stumbling and sagging, breathing convulsively, nearly at the limit of endurance.

The rider swung himself down and went afoot, leading the submissive, vanquished brute following weakly with lowered head.

"Reckon I won't be holding it against you any longer, now you've been wised up a little on what's what," the master remarked over his shoulder. "You and Stola both have needed to be snaffled, and it has done all hands good!"

Tonus hitched the roan to the fence in front of the county buildings; courthouse, jail and sheriff's residence made up a little group of structures.

The turnkey came blinking after Tonus had twirled the handle of the gong affixed to the outer door of the jail.

"I'm deputy sheriff from Stola—name o' Tonus Bowen."

"Hah!" gasped the freshly awakened officer, staring hard. "We heard consid'able about you last night."

"You sure must have," admitted Tonus. "From one Cale Bawson, of course. But I'm here with my own story. Post me, please! I didn't meet 'em, but I suppose the high sheriff and the coroner are on the way to Stola."

"Coroner is, along with a deputy sheriff. Sheriff Dunn couldn't leave here 'cause court is in session. I can't call the sheriff this early." He swung the door wide. "You better step in."

"Of course." Tonus assented cordially. He walked into the guard room. "I'm already arrested, Mister Turnkey. Have sort of arrested myself for the time being till the thing can be cleared up. I'm not ready to try my case before you, understand. I'm simply tell-

ing you that Cale Bawson is so much of a crooked liar that if he swallowed a toothpick he'd cough it up, curled like a shingle shaving. And where is Cale, by the way—if you know?"

"Locked up in a cell," replied the turnkey, stabbing a thumb gesture over his shoulder. "He said you'd be chasing him down here and he begged to be locked up so you couldn't get at him and kill *him*, too, for reporting on you."

An expansive grin, his first smile in many an hour, spread over the visage of Tonus.

"That was good judgment, getting himself locked up, as Cale looked at the thing. He knows well enough I ought to kill him. But we'll let all rest. And I need some rest, myself, after a blamed hard night. Will you let me curl up there in a corner on the floor? Wake me when the sheriff comes on deck."

"You'd better flop on the couch where I nap, Deputy Bowen. I can see by your style there's a whole lot to be said, besides what Bawson has told us."

"There sure *is*, Mister Turnkey. Excuse me for not posting you on it right now. But"—he pressed back a yawn with his palm and smiled wanly, apologetically—"I'm plumb, awful tired, sir."

As it seemed to Tonus, he went to sleep in mid-air, falling toward the couch.

When he opened his eyes again he was looking up into the countenance of Sheriff Dunn and found no severity of accusation.

Tonus swung his feet to the floor and started in earnestly on his statement.

The sheriff set hand on the deputy's shoulder and checked him.

"Bowen, this isn't a regular case for the court, and I sensed as much when Bawson banged in here and reported it. I sized him while he talked. A grudge is working, eh?" He nodded indorsement of the declaration made by Tonus. "Hold fire, son. Hold it! You're my

deputy and I don't want the shrievalty tarred in a mess in open court when there's no excuse nor reason. There's a half hour yet before court opens. His honor is having his smoke in chambers. County attorney is with him. This case isn't regular, I say. So let's handle it different." He squinted quizzically at Tonus. "Bawson seems to be afraid of you, deputy. Asked to be locked up away from you, at any rate."

"I've had my run-in with him, Sheriff Dunn. I was obliged to hand him a little something when he started to lead a buck in Stola against having a deputy sheriff."

That statement plainly stirred livelier interest in the high sheriff.

"I'm going to have a few minutes' talk with the judge and county prosecutor in chambers, Bowen. Ahead of your coming! You go with the turnkey and you bring in Bawson. Just knock and I'll open. Then make your talk. I'm hoping this is a case that'll never go before the grand jury."

The sheriff departed on his errand, and Tonus followed the turnkey to the cell tiers.

Though bolts had been shoved on him at his own request, Bawson was at a moral disadvantage behind bars, felt it, showed it. He backed away and sat on his cot when he saw Tonus at the door.

"Cale," said Tonus amiably, "things were more or less wowed up for all of us in Stola yesterday. But I'm feeling diffident this morning, and I hope it's the same with you. From this time on, I'm laying off you with my hands and I'm hoping you'll lay off me with your tongue. You and I are taking a little walk. Please spring the lock, Mister Turnkey."

Bawson, ushered into the presence of the black-robed judge, was awed.

Tonus stepped forward, squared his shoulders, held up manful chin and told his story.

"Now what have you to say, Caleb Bawson?" demanded the justice.

"I'm afeared I'm going to get jugged," Bawson whined abjectly.

"Not for telling the truth, sir. But for perjury, if this case goes into court, yes!" declared his honor with emphasis. "This, here, is not a court of law. You're not under oath. You have an opportunity to talk like a man to men. What say?"

"I was awful mad and turrible tempted to lie, sir and gents. And I done it. And I stained that beetle and fixed her hairs onto it. I was hid behind blankets and I reelly didn't see nothing of what happened. That's the truth—and I've found it's a dretful thing to be locked up in a cell like I was last night," he quavered. "Hope I stay out o' jail forever after!"

After that declaration, silence was prolonged in the room.

His honor was shrewdly, mentally paying tribute to the efficacy of the psychology involved in this affair.

"If I may be allowed to speak a word more, your honor," ventured Tonus, "I'll say the horse in the case is hitched to the fence in front of your windows."

Watch for another story by Holman Day, appearing soon.

"Better take a look at the criminal, Mister County Attorney," suggested the justice.

The prosecutor walked to a window, surveyed the weary animal standing with low-hung head, and came back to the judge.

"It occurs to me, your honor, I can't have the grand jury indict a horse."

The judge rose from his chair, settled his robe and passed out of his private door to the bench, preceded by the high sheriff and followed by the county attorney.

The two left in the chamber heard the sonorous proclamation of the clerk of the court:

"All persons who have anything to do before the honorable justice of the supreme judicial court, now holden in and for the county——"

"Well, Cale," remarked Tonus in low tones, "as it now stands, guess you and I haven't anything to do before the honorable court. But I've got plenty to do upcountry—bringing in a bunch of prisoners from Walpole. Maybe you'll be willing to take a hand as one of the guards. Yes? All right! Good for you! Let's be starting for Stola."

SAFETY FIRST?

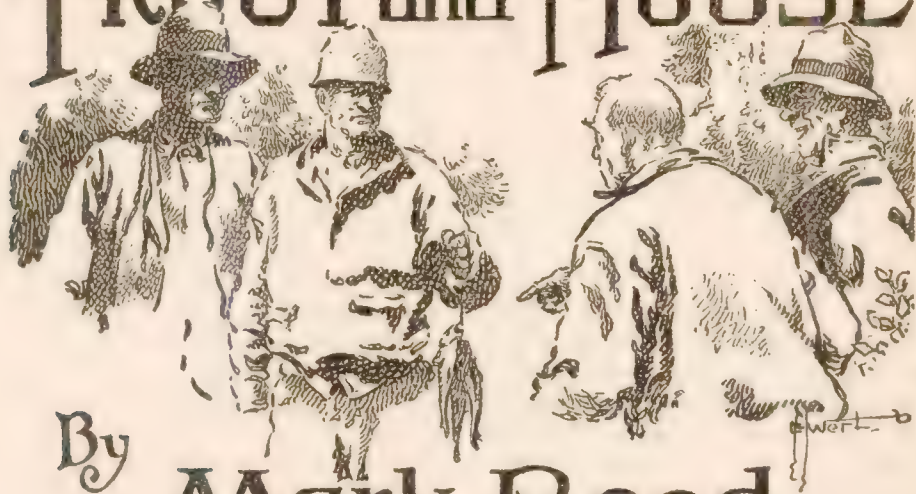
THE wise man who described human life as the cheapest thing on earth is more or less backed up in his findings by E. Joseph Aronoff, secretary and chief clerk of the Federal Board for Vocational Education.

"Every six minutes on every day of the year," he says, "a fatal accident of some kind occurs in the United States."

THE FATE OF ELDERLY PRESIDENTS

OF all the presidents this country has had, from George Washington down to Calvin Coolidge, only three were more than sixty-one years of age when they were inaugurated. And what happened to them? James Buchanan, inaugurated when he was sixty-five, was not renominated. William Henry Harrison, going into the White House at the age of sixty-eight, died less than a month afterward. Zachary Taylor, inaugurated at sixty-four, died less than a year afterward.

TROUT and MOOSE



By

Mark Reed

Author of "A Social Knock-out," Etc.

Dugan, the middleweight champion, dreamed of a peaceful fishing trip—but it turned out to be far, far from tranquil!

A COMPLETE STORY

LEN FOLGEREY, lessee of the Garden, glanced down at the check which he had just signed. It was for thirty-seven thousand five hundred dollars. Then he looked across his mahogany flat-top at the man to whom this tidy sum was payable.

"Well, Pete," he drawled, "looks as though you had the price to go most anywhere."

"Yeah, I got the money."

There were four of them talking in the office: Folgerey, brisk and dapper in his white-linen suit; Pete Dugan, the middleweight champion; Dan Stringer, Dugan's manager; and Ole Linstad, his trainer. The day was hot and they were flushed both with heat and with victory. For the previous evening Dugan had successfully defended his title in a wow of a bout which had gone the full twelve rounds to a knock-out.

His face still bore traces of the battle. There was a "mouse" under his right eye, while his thick neck and square, scowling countenance showed a mottled red. It had been a hard fight and he looked tired.

Stringer turned to Folgerey.

"I tell Pete I don't want him to put on a glove for six weeks," he said. "I don't want him to even train."

"Why don't you send him across the pond and let him have a look at Europe?"

"Nix on Europe," said Dugan.

"How about Atlantic City? Lots of the boys are down there."

The champion shook his head.

"Then go out home and see the folks."

"His folks bane dead, Mr. Folgerey," volunteered Ole, his blue eyes glistening under his thatch of yellow hair.

"He bane alone in world, except for me."

Folgerey shifted his cigar and gazed out upon the Eighth Avenue roofs baking in the July sun.

"Well, where do you want to go?" he asked. "Don't tell me you want to take a vacation right here in Central Park."

An embarrassed look came into Dugan's face. He shifted his right knee nervously.

"I tell you birds what I'd really like to do," he said. "I'd like to go fishing. I don't mean fishing where a guy catches a few pickerel or a bushel of suckers off a river wharf. Ole and me have had enough of that kind. I mean fishing where you catch forty or fifty big trout at a whack, some of 'em ten pounders!"

Folgerey leaned back and laughed with joy.

"You poor devil!" he said. "Haven't you ever had any real fishing? Let me fix you up. I know a rich chap up in Canada that'll be glad to entertain you——"

Dugan raised a protesting hand.

"Whoa!" he said. "That entertainment stuff is out. I want to fish in my old clothes, and I don't want a cup of tea in my hand, either."

"Then why don't you and Ole sneak up to the Mascuppics? Best fishing in the world up there."

"Is there?" said Dugan.

"But don't go under your own name," interposed Folgerey. "If you do you'll have half the State of Maine sitting on the banks to watch you fish."

Joe Driscol, proprietor of the Samoset Lodge at Big Mascuppic, was a shrewd host. Instead of cooping his guests up in narrow, plastered chambers, there to stifle under the eaves, he accommodated them in a series of small log cabins scattered over a heavily wooded peninsula some five acres in extent. In the center of this peninsula

was a rambling cabin with many additions which housed the dining room, office, et cetera. And it was here on the afternoon following their conversation in Folgerey's office that Dugan and Ole found Driscol awaiting them, a kindly old-timer in shirt sleeves, with stubby beard and a moderate manner. In his day he had been guide, timber scaler, hunter and trapper.

"Ha, yes!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Casey and Mr. Swenson. I got your telegram, and I been expectin' you." As he spoke he was taking down a large key fastened to a shingle about a foot long. "I think maybe as how I'll put you in No. 17—if you ain't no objections."

"Sounds like a lucky number," said Dugan.

As they followed the proprietor along a needle-covered path, Dugan's satisfaction grew with leaps and bounds. This was as swell a layout as he could ask for. Through the trees he caught occasional glimpses of Big Mascuppic sparkling in the sunlight, and as they drew nearer the water's edge the evergreens began to be mingled with huge paper birches, whose white boles stood out with dazzling clarity against the blue of the sky and water. The path took a twist and they stood below a cabin constructed of heavy logs with the bark still on. —

"Two rooms, bath, fireplace, and porch," announced Driscol; then added tartly: "If it ain't what you want, it's the best I can give you."

"It bane darn nice," said Ole.

Dugan grinned. Already he saw himself lolling in the hammock on the porch, gazing lazily out across the water while Ole fried the choicest specimens of the day's catch at the stone fireplace before the door. And then, as if to add verisimilitude to his dream, a canoe glided into sight about ten yards offshore. There was a fierce ripple of water and what looked like a

silver arm flashed in the air to the right of it. The three men on shore watched the ensuing battle breathlessly. At one time the fish seemed to have escaped. But it had only gone to the bottom of the lake to sulk for a moment. Soon the reel was humming again. Back and forth the fight waged. Then a black fin cut the water close by the canoe, and the landing net made a quick scoop.

"Attaboy!" called Dugan.

The men in the canoe, aware of an audience, held up their capture. To the newcomers' greedy eyes it looked a yard long.

"Fishing pretty good here?" asked Dugan.

"Waal, yes, t'ain't bad," said Driscoll. "Fishermen's luck is uncertain, you know, but, taking it all in all, it's one of the best seasons we ever had."

"Can't be too good to suit us. Now how about boats?"

"You folks will have to see 'Moose' about boats."

"Moose?"

"That's the name of the feller that runs the boat livery for me. He'll fix you up for any kind of craft you want. Canoe, outboard motor, sailboat, or mud scow!"

As soon as they could unpack their rods, Dugan and Ole headed down the path which the proprietor of the Samoset had pointed out. It led to a floating platform built of logs covered with planks and reached from the shore by a runway equipped with rollers down which boats could be slid from the boathouse. Around this platform bobbed and jostled a fleet of gayly painted canoes. There was no one in sight.

"Hello!" yelled Dugan. "Hey, Moose!"

Again no answer.

"Gee," muttered Dugan, "I've heard there's a way you call moose with a horn. Maybe we gotta call this bird that way."

"Maybe he bane in boathouse."

Dugan ran back up the runway and looked in at the open door. He started back in horror, then realized that the long figure in canvas trousers, faded shirt and mud-stained shoes hanging from the crossbeam was not a suicide, but a young man engaged in chinning himself.

"Twenty-four," grunted the young man.

"Your name Moose?" ventured Dugan.

The chinner looked sulkily over the crossbeam at the intruder in the doorway. "Twenty-five," he said.

"Sorry to interrupt. I want to hire a canoe."

"Twenty-six."

"Hey, are you Moose?"

"Twenty-seven."

Dugan's gore rose as closer inspection showed that the fellow before him was no irresponsible trapeze-performing stripling, but a gangling six-footer at least old enough to vote.

"Twenty-eight."

"Say, how about postponing the physical culture for a moment?"

"Twenty-nine."

Dugan leaned against the door jam and waited. This was Moose, all right. Elongated though the performer on the crossbeam was, his hulking shoulders and tapering waist and legs cried out for the nickname. And if this was not enough, the long nose, thick under lip and pair of extremely alert eyes completed the picture. Not so pleasant a customer on a dark night, thought Dugan.

"Thirty-five!"

Moose dropped to the floor as lightly as a cat.

"Come on if you want a canoe!" he growled, and hurried down the runway.

Dugan followed.

"There y' are!" snapped Moose, slapping two paddles into the shabbiest

canoe in his fleet. "See you bring it back in good shape."

"Mebbe you like us to paint it for you while we bane gone," said Ole.

"Shut up, 'Squarehead,'" said Dugan. Then he turned to the man on the wharf with a conciliatory grin. "Say, Jack," he said good-naturedly, "we're strangers up here. Where's the best place to fish?"

"In the lake."

"You win," said Dugan, but his knuckles whitened as he gripped his paddle. Looking back, he saw Moose hurry up the runway and disappear into the woods at a trot. "Huh!" he grunted, "hope he forgets to come back!"

"He needs one good crack in the jaw."

"Yeah? Well, he ain't going to get it. We're up here to fish, not teach the boys manners."

Night was casting out a long, black shadow from the wooded shore when Dugan and Ole came in sight of the Samoset wharf again. Moose was back. There was no mistaking that thin-legged, broad-shouldered build of his. But this time he had a companion, a small, bent man, evidently elderly, for he was leaning on a cane. The two were engaged in conversation, but at sight of the canoe approaching through the dusk, Moose plucked at his companion's sleeve. They separated abruptly and the older man became suddenly absorbed in watching the thin crescent moon hanging like a scimitar in the dark fir tops.

Moose shot out a huge hand and grasped the gunwale of the incoming craft.

"Any fish?" he demanded.

"No," muttered Ole sourly.

"Didn't expect you'd ketch anythin'."

"No?" said Ole. "Why not?"

Moose shot a pointed look at Dugan and raised his voice.

"The fish around this lake are mighty partic'lar who they let catch 'em."

The remark in itself might have been mere backwoods jocosity, but there was a chip on the speaker's shoulder and deliberate insult in the tone of his voice. Ole turned to Dugan, but the latter had apparently not heard. He was staring at the elderly man at the farther side of the wharf.

"Pete," demanded Ole, when they were out of earshot, "did you get that last wise crack Moose handed you?"

"No."

Ole repeated it.

"Yeah?" said Dugan. "I missed that one. I was busy looking at Moose's friend. He was looking at me as though he never expected to see me again, so I returned the compliment. Some swell dresser. Big diamond ring. Gold-headed cane. And creases in his knickers. Certainly a flashy old boy for the Maine woods!"

They went into their cabin, lighted two kerosene lamps, and began to get ready for dinner. At length Ole broke the silence.

"Pete, I t'ank that canoe fella bane goin' to be a problem."

Dugan rubbed his hand thoughtfully over his close-cropped head.

"Yeah?"

"I t'ank he got something personal against you."

"Yeah?"

"What you say to him in the boat-house?"

"Me? Nothing." Then Dugan saw his trainer's distressed face. "Hey, Squarehead, snap out of it!" he said. "You're imaginin' too much. Moose ain't got nothin' against me. I never K. O.'d any friend of his. He never even heard of me. These guys brought up in the woods always act queer. I know; I was one once myself. They haven't been around, so when they meet some one who has been around, it makes 'em grouchy. To-morrow we'll

come in with a big string of fish and hand Moose five bucks, and he'll think we're the swellest two patrons he ever had."

The next morning at daybreak a heavy, low-lying fog was covering the lake, and there was a chill in the air which made them rush for their sweaters. At the wharf Moose was busy dispatching two rubber-coated fishermen. His sleeves were rolled up and his thin cotton shirt wide open at the throat as though he was working in the heat of the day. At sight of Dugan his whole bearing changed. He turned on his heel and started to walk away.

"Mornin', Moose," said Dugan. "How about a canoe?"

"I ain't had breakfast yet. You'll have to wait."

Dugan got between him and the shore.

"I don't think I'll wait," he said. "I think I'll take one right now."

For a moment Moose seemed to waver, then he turned back sulkily to the wharf.

"You folks might as well stayed abed," he muttered. "You won't catch nothin'."

Dugan made no answer, but stood watching, a thoughtful scowl upon his face, as Moose reluctantly began to put a canoe into the water. Each move the lanky, broad-shouldered fellow made seemed to hurt him, and he muttered fiercely to himself. Then suddenly his mood underwent a total change.

"Funny you didn't have any better luck last night," he said. "What kind of bait did you show 'em?"

Dugan told him.

"Well, no wonder!" he exclaimed. "What you want to use is smelt. Here, I got a few left. Let me get 'em for you."

In a moment Moose returned from the boathouse bearing a small tin pail in which were a dozen or two small, sluggish fish of a silvery hue. He de-

posited them briskly in the end of their canoe.

"Use 'em either with a single hook, or with your spinners," he said, "and you'll ketch more salmon than you can paddle ashore."

"Much obliged."

"Don't mention it. I didn't know anythin' about fishin' once myself."

Dugan cast a level glance at him.

"You're a pretty wise guy now."

The other swaggered.

"I'll say I am." And as he spoke Moose shoved the canoe out into the lake with such force that it nearly threw Dugan into the water.

But it was not until they came back three hours later that they learned exactly how wise Moose was. The two rubber-coated sportsmen who had gone out at daybreak were just in, unloading their catch on the wharf. As Dugan stared at the string of speckled beauties and tried to count them, one of the successful fishermen looked up, a complacent smile on his face.

"What luck, boys?" he called.

Dugan eyed the three yellow perch in the bottom of his canoe.

"Fair," he said. "Not much."

"What kind of bait you giving 'em?"

"Smelt mostly."

The questioner's eyes widened incredulously, and he turned to his companion.

"Get that, Harry?" he asked. "They're using smelt." Then he addressed himself to Dugan again. "Lord, man," he said pityingly, "smelt aren't worth a hang except for a week or two after the ice breaks up."

"Oh, I don't know," said Dugan. "I've had pretty good luck with 'em in July."

"Then you're the first man that ever has."

The two fishermen were still laughing as they disappeared toward the lodge, their superb catch strung triumphantly between them. Champion

and trainer exchanged glances. No doubt about it. Moose had played them for a pair of suckers. But before they could relieve their feelings by speech, Moose was guiding their canoe alongside the wharf. He was evidently in ill humor, for his voice rose angrily.

"Look here," he demanded. "What's the idea of all this dirty water in the canoe?"

Dugan leveled a hard glance at him.

"Your darn smelt pail leaked," he said tersely.

"Hadn't any leak in it when I gave it to you."

"Yeah?" said Dugan. "What's the idea of springing smelt on us in the first place?"

Moose took on a look of innocence.

"Didn't you get a good ketch?" he queried.

"You know damn well we didn't."

"Mighty peculiar. Folks hereabouts say there's nothing like smelt to catch suckers with."

Dugan jumped out upon the wharf.

"Hey, you, come across! What's your game?"

"Game?"

"Yeah, game. You and me never met before. What's the idea of working so hard to get me sore?"

Moose turned and looked in the direction of the boathouse. His movement suggested for all the world a man seeking moral support. And if it was moral support that he needed, he must have found plenty, for when he faced Dugan again, he had not one chip on his shoulder but a dozen.

"Try and find out," he sneered.

Dugan's face reddened and his right arm drew back. Ole caught him by the wrist.

"Mr. Casey," he said sternly.

The champion's arm dropped, and he became suddenly suave and courteous.

"You're right, Swenson," he said. "We sure can't have any trouble."

"Any time you get your nerve back,

drop round," called Moose after them. "I'll be here waiting."

As they passed the boathouse they saw the old man whose conversation with Moose they had interrupted the night before. He was seated in a folding chair, half hidden behind the open door, his thin fingers clasped over the head of his cane, his attitude one of cat-like alertness, his thin lips pinched together distrustfully. As on the previous evening he was flashily dressed and in his tie was a diamond pin.

"Did you see the old bird snoopin' in the boathouse?" asked Dugan.

Ole nodded.

"Squarehead, that pair's framing us somehow—or my name's not Pete Dugan."

"That reminds me," said Ole. "Your name ban't Dugan. It's Casey. Don't forget. You almost did just now."

During lunch they tried to figure Moose out.

"I bane talking last night to fella," said Ole. "He say there bane lots of rum running across the border twenty-five miles north of here. Maybe Moose and oder fella tank we bane revenue officers disguised as fishermen."

"Why the hell should they think that?"

Ole smiled sheepishly.

"They seen us fish, Pete."

Dugan scowled.

"I can catch fish, all right," he said, "if given half a chance. You go on right back to the shack. I'm going to see what I can find out from the proprietor."

Driscoll was nothing loath when it came to conversation. He settled down in his office chair and waved Dugan to a rocking-chair beside him.

"Well, now from your description," he chirped, "I should say it was old Jared Scudder you was asking about. He's one of Mascuppic's old stand-bys. Been coming here for twenty summers. Has a camp of his own just beyond

where my property leaves off, and uses my boats when he wants one, which ain't often, as he don't fish much now. Though couldn't none of 'em beat old Jared in his day at casting a fly. Great all-round sportsman!"

Dugan pricked up his ears.

"Did he ever follow the fights?"

"Prize fightin', you mean? Not that I ever heard tell of, Mr. Casey. He's a pretty strict churchman. They say he owns about half of Portland, but you wouldn't know it. He's tight's the bark on a tree. Why, he don't so much as buy a box of cigars till he's smoked one first to make sure he ain't bein' cheated."

Nothing Driscoll said seemed to explain why Scudder should be hanging around the boathouse. Obviously the old man was eccentric, and if he had been an expert fisherman he might be hiring Moose to kid greenhorns from the city. However, it didn't seem likely. Guardedly, Dugan switched the conversation around to Moose himself. Something of the smelt trick must have reached Driscoll, for a faint smile played about his eyes.

"Moose giving you good service, ain't he?"

"Sure," said Dugan.

"Well, if he ain't, just you let me hear about it. Moose is kind of an independent cuss. I don't know much about him. Comes from up around Millinocket, I understand. Spends his winters lumbering. I took a chance hiring him, but I wanted a husky chap. Feller I hired last summer wa'n't at it a week before he got all tired out and had to have a helper. This season Moose has handled the job alone, and I guess had time on his hands to spare."

Dugan grinned good-naturedly.

"He's been pretty busy when I've seen him," he said.

That afternoon the occupants of cabin No. 17 gave the fish a rest, but the next morning their alarm clock woke them

up at dawn. Ole raised himself upon one elbow and looked out the window. The fog outside was so heavy that he could not see the water. Even the fir trees ten feet away seemed suspended in mist.

"This bane no morning to fish," he yawned.

But Dugan was already out of bed.

"Get up," he said. "We're going fishing. We're not letting that bird down at the boathouse think he's kidded us off the lake!"

They plodded down the path in silence. Each twig, needle and leaf was bejeweled with drops of congealed mist, and almost every step they took some low-lying branch flipped its load of water in their faces.

"This is fun," muttered Dugan.

"It bane all right if we caught any fish."

"Sure, it would be great if we caught any fish."

As they came up Moose was bailing out a canoe and whistling merrily. Instantly his whistle stopped. He gave no answer to their "Good morning," and the atmosphere became electric with insult. Even so they might have embarked without an actual explosion had not Moose caught a look at Dugan's face as he reached upon the wharf for his tackle box. The champion's thug-like countenance, never much to boast of, was rendered acutely plain by the weather. His short-clipped hair looked sparse and limp. Drops of mist hung from his jaw.

"It's your face!" sneered Moose. "That's why you can't ketch any fish. You scare 'em away."

With one bound Dugan was back upon the wharf. His right fist shot out. Moose ducked the blow and fell to his knees, while an expression of intense chagrin such as a man might wear who had blown up an arsenal and wished he hadn't, came to his face. He cast one quick look toward the boathouse, then

scrambled into a canoe and paddled hurriedly out of danger.

Dugan watched him disappear into the fog.

"Huh!" he exclaimed to Ole. "Guess that will pipe him down. He's nothing but a big overgrown bully, anyway. All he needs is a sock in the jaw, and he'll be a darn nice guy. He's got a swell pair of shoulders."

"Yes," said Ole, "his shoulders bane all right."

Moose's headlong rush to get away from Dugan's fists put them in good humor. For a couple of hours they trolled about in the fog, then Ole pulled in a pickerel. Pickerel were not what they wanted, but when they got out the scales, it weighted three pounds and four ounces. Ole grinned. Their luck was changing! Then to raise their spirits further, the sun began to break through the fog. Glimpses of the shore began to be visible, and the air, so recently cold and clammy, began to feel hot and steamy.

"Let's slip in along that east bank," said Dugan. "Looks as though we might do some business in there."

His fly had scarcely grazed the water when a streak of peacock blue leaped into the air, then disappeared in a splash of spray. The reel sang.

"You got one!" whispered Ole hoarsely. "It bane mighty big landlock salmon, too, I tank!"

Dugan's legs braced and his features set into their fiercest ringside scowl. The fish leaped into the air again.

"Pete, keep your line tight."

"Shut up! Get ready to paddle when I tell you."

For five minutes the contest raged, now on one side of the canoe, now the other. The leaps of the struggling salmon became less frequent, and with a powerful wrist Dugan began to draw him slowly toward the point where Ole was waiting with extended landing net. Suddenly Dugan turned.

"What's that?" he demanded.

A motor boat with a string of three canoes in tow had rounded the point, and was bearing down on them at full speed, the racket of its motor reverberating from the wooded shore like a dozen machine guns. At the wheel sat Moose, bareheaded, unclad to the waist. He waved an insolent hand.

"Ketchin' much?" he yelled.

"You damn fool, keep away!" shouted Ole. "We have yust hooked a fish!"

But Moose came on. The motor boat swerved and passed between the canoe and the shore at a distance of perhaps ten yards, then headed for the center of the lake. In a few moments it had become only a blur of sound in the distance; but the canoe still rocked in its wash. Dugan turned to give full attention to his fish again. He tugged gently at the line; then firmly. There was no resistance. In the excitement of Moose's passing, the line had loosened and the fish thrown himself off the hook. Dugan sat down and eyed the four specks of Moose's flotilla disappearing around the point.

"Squarehead," he said sadly, "did yuh ever see a guy so determined to get beaten up?"

"He yust begs for it."

"I bet that fish weighed twenty pounds!"

"And Pete," lamented Ole, "it ban't only that fish. That crazy fella with his motor has scared away every fish along the whole shore."

Dugan picked up his rod.

"Maybe not," he said. "Let's paddle along a bit. We might get another strike."

The scraping twenty pounder had damaged the old fly. Dugan put on a new Silver Doctor, and began to cast again. But his heart was not in it. Of a big and rather generous nature himself, these petty harassments had begun to hurt him more than they annoyed

him. Outside of the few hours a year he spent in the ring, his idea was "live and let live." Give the other guy a boost. Now as he mechanically skipped his bait into shady coves where no fish seemed to lurk, he tried to look upon Moose as nothing but a backwoods bully trying to be funny.

It couldn't be done. There was something too purposeful, too cold-bloodedly deliberate about Moose's tactics. He acted as though he had a personal grudge. Again, the age of the fellow—he couldn't be more than twenty-one. That complicated the problem, took all the edge off the pleasure of thrashing him. Maybe the best way out was to shift the fishing trip to another lake. The idea galled.

"Pete!" cried his trainer. "That damn Moose bane coming back!"

It was true. The motor boat, its train of canoes now delivered, was bearing down on them again at full speed. Dugan took one look, and returned to his casting. His face wore much the look of a bulldog being barked at by an extremely distasteful young pup. When Moose, his motor roaring, had circled the canoe and gone on his way, Dugan unjointed his rod and picked up a paddle.

"Squarehead," he said grimly, "enough's enough."

"Those bane just exactly my sentiments."

As they neared the wharf Moose was disappearing into the boathouse. In a moment he reappeared.

"Look out he don't yump in boat and beat it," cautioned Ole.

Dugan looked at his watch. It was still only eight o'clock. The guests were all at breakfast, and but for Moose not a soul was in sight either about the landing or out upon the lake. The hour was ripe for chastisement.

As the two men leaped upon the wharf, Moose apparently sensed what was coming. He stopped short, but did

not waver. With clenched fists he waited. Dugan wasted no words.

"Young feller, either you cut the comedy, or I'll knock the hell out of you. Which will it be?"

Moose glanced furtively toward the boathouse.

"No use tryin' to run——"

"Fact I run this morning is no sign I run now. Come on; let's see you knock hell out of me."

Moose's tone rang true, but there was no swagger in him. The chips had dropped off his shoulders. An almost hunted look, like that of a man who knew he had to fight for his life, came into his eyes. With his insolence gone he looked more boyish and overgrown than ever. Dugan could even see the fine down on his cheek bones where his razor stopped. Dugan's fists unclenched. The champion of the world laying into an overgrown bumpkin of twenty-one! He could not do it.

Moose was quick to sense his indecision.

"Come on!" he taunted. "Trot out your lickin'! Put up or shut up; that's what goes in these woods."

Dugan turned to Ole. The Swede was a tricky boxer, and the last year or so had weighed around one hundred and fifty pounds. At least it would give the kid a Chinaman's chance.

"Hey, Squarehead," he said. "See if you can knock some sense into this guy's head. I haven't the heart."

Ole, nothing loath, memory of that lost salmon still rankling, danced in, his head lowered. Dugan stepped back. As the two men squared off he was struck by the likeness of the floating wharf to a ring. All that was lacking was the ropes.

"Come on, State of Maine!" he yelled, instinctively warming to the situation. "Show us what you got. We'll give you a square deal!"

As he spoke he stooped to pick up a paddle lying in the way. There was

a heavy thud and he turned to see his trainer stretched motionless on the wharf. He stared in amazement. Where was the Swede's science? Ole ought to have tied him up in a knot. But already Moose was rushing in.

"Come on, you smelt fisherman!" he was muttering. "Come on; you're next!"

"Yeah?" queried Dugan.

As he sidestepped and escaped with no more than a smart clip in the temple, the idea of discipline still lingered in Dugan's mind. He would tie up Moose with a bombardment of pulled blows, and then crowd him into the lake. But Moose did not crowd so easily. Instantly Dugan saw he was up against a man who had boxed before. An interchange of a dozen blows, and he saw he was up against a man who had boxed a lot. He became absorbed in the technical problem of seeing if he could crowd his opponent into the lake. But each time he maneuvered him to the water's edge, Moose always managed to twist out of his predicament with a pantherish agility.

Then—*wham!*

It was a right that brought Dugan to his knees. Also it brought to him the sudden realization that this was to be a fight. Moose packed a wallop! In the fraction of a second that he rested on his knee to steady his brain, Dugan caught a glimpse of the shore. An audience was arriving. Among them he made out old Jared Scudder, leaning on his cane. A moment later, from another angle, Dugan saw that several canoes had drawn up around the wharf, while fifty yards off two more were approaching frantically. In one of them sat a plump lady in a bright-pink dress under a green parasol.

"Why don't you make them stop?" she shrieked hysterically to some one on shore.

"Don't let 'em stop us," muttered Moose.

"Don't worry," said Dugan. "*They* won't stop you."

There was little danger of interference. Had it been rough and tumble, some hero might have stepped in; but it was too professional. They were fighting in too clean-cut and matter-of-fact a way. It made the affair seem less desperate than it really was.

Dugan wiped the sweat from his eyes, and studied his man. Moose obviously was not fighting in any burst of rage or braggadocio. He was cool, patient, deliberate; and his long lean face was grim with determination. For some unimaginable reason, it was to be a battle to the finish. With a sense of exasperation Dugan settled down to it.

He had long since given up all idea of crowding his opponent into the lake. It had got to be a knock-out. Four times he worked in and tried to get a jab to the jaw under Moose's guard. Each time it was neatly blocked. Then he shifted, came in left shoulder forward and feinted for a right. The left jab that followed, though it traveled only twelve inches, traveled to an open target, Moose's chin jerked up and he went over backwards; but he had scarcely struck the planking of the wharf before he was up again. He laughed derisively.

"Aw, put some steam in it!"

Dugan eyed him sourly. His ungloved fist still hurt from the effects of that left jab, and he foresaw a new dilemma. He could not risk breaking his hands. He decided to do some sharpshooting; with a couple of deft light blows he might close the eyes of this young lumber-camp husky.

But it was like sharpshooting at a ghost. Finally he succeeded in bringing Moose's right eye to partial grief. But not without expense to himself. His own face was cut, too. A terrific right with "K. O." pasted on it whistled past his ear. An inch or two closer

and it might have got him. His exasperation began to be colored with admiration. This Moose could scrap.

There was an almost continual yelling now from the shore. Moose supporters from the kitchen and garage had arrived, and Dugan's trained ear quickly told him that sentiment was all against him. Then a voice near at hand disassociated from the general hubbub. It was Ole, back from poppyland. He had crawled up on the runway where he sat rubbing his jaw, a disgusted look on his face.

"Go in! Go in!" he shouted. "Why don't you give him the whole works?"

"Sure," muttered Dugan ironically to himself, "why don't I?"

With increased caution he turned his attention to Moose's other eye. The wharf had become blazing hot, and Dugan found himself missing the old familiar gong which meant sixty seconds of precious rest. They must have been fighting an hour at least. Moose, however, seemed as fresh as ever. As he panted for breath there flickered through Dugan's consciousness for the first time in his life the thought that he was not so young as he once was. Thirty-one. While this easy-breathing youngster pressing in on him was twenty-one. Moose had the priceless asset.

This disturbing thought, even as it came, was given additional weight by a killing right-hander to his cheek bone. Dugan rode the blow and kept his feet. But the handwriting on the wall was obvious. Moose was breaking through. This was no time to play Santa Claus, no time to spare his knuckles. Another one of those pile-driver wallops and a new champion might be crowned. Informally, to be sure; but defeat is none the sweeter from being met on a canoe landing in northern Maine.

Dugan worked in and took a vicious swing. Moose went down. "It had to be done, kid," he muttered. And then

he saw it hadn't been done. The lumber-camp kid was up like a rubber ball, his guard still high, his fighting spirit undiminished.

"Had enough?" asked Dugan.

"Jus' gettin' started!"

It took a dozen minutes more before the older man could make another opening. But this time it was over. Moose's arms hung limp from his broad shoulders, and he sank down heavily to the wharf. Dugan stood dazed and groggy for a moment, then his head cleared. Seizing a pail he began to splash water into the face of his prostrate opponent. Moose's eyes opened, and he started to his feet. Dugan caught him by the shoulders.

"Hey, big boy," he said. "Lie down. I've had enough if you haven't."

At this moment Joe Driscoll, called to the scene by an excited guest, came hurrying down the runway. His voice quivered with apology.

"Mr. Casey," he said, "I'm mighty sorry about this. You ought to have made a complaint about this chap."

"Oh, that's all right," said Dugan. "Just a little private grievance, that's all."

Then he saw the look of inquiry.

"I don't know what the hell the grievance was about," he added. "But anyway, it had to be settled."

Before the proprietor of Samoset Lodge could get this somewhat obscure remark clear in his mind, Dugan had slipped his arm through Ole's, and was helping him up the runway. At the boathouse he saw the bent figure of Jared Scudder in the doorway.

"Like the scrap?" he asked.

But the old man did not answer. He eyed the battered and bruised pair passing him with a kind of incredulous curiosity as though he had never seen anything like them before.

"Pete," mumbled Ole apologetically, as they started up the path to their cabin, "I t'ank I bane able to handle

Moose all right. I jyst didn't get started."

Dugan looked at his watch.

"That's all right, Squarehead," he said. "Don't you feel bad because you didn't knock him out. It took me forty-five minutes."

"Forty-five minutes?"

"Fifteen rounds."

Ole blinked and tried to clear his thoughts.

"Bane he good, you mean?"

"Good! Well, I ain't ever going to meet him again—for pleasure.

Dugan lighted the water heater in their cabin while Ole was digging out his trainer's kit, and soon the commingled odors of witch-hazel, alcohol, and iodine gave the rustic interior all the atmosphere of a dressing room at the end of a big bout. After a shower and rubdown they compared injuries. Moose had struck Ole twice. There was one knob on the trainer's temple and another at the base of his jaw. Looking in a mirror, Dugan found both his own eyes were puffed and purple. He clinched and unclined his fingers gingerly. Apparently no knuckles were broken. "Huh!" he muttered. "This is a helluva fishing trip!"

A knock at the door interrupted.

It was a small boy in skin-tight jersey and enormous knickers who extended a note. On a piece of grimy paper which had apparently been torn from a bag Dugan read as follows:

Hope you show up to-morrow morning as usual. I will be at wharf any time after daybreak.

MOOSE McWILLIAMS.

Dugan sank into a chair.

"Holy mackerel!" he exclaimed. "That guy wants a return fight in the morning!"

A look of alarm came into his trainer's face.

"You ban't goin' to go?"

"I don't know," said Dugan tersely. "Depends how strong I feel."

When they went up to the central cabin for lunch a good many curious glances were turned in their direction, and afterward in the office they heard several expressions of sympathy. But no intelligent comments. Dugan went back to his cabin in disgust. Apparently not one of these trout experts knew they had enjoyed ringside seats at a scrap which ought to have cost them twenty-five dollars apiece!

All afternoon Dugan and Ole debated on what they had better do. At last Dugan came to a decision.

"I'm going right ahead trying to fish," he said. "If this lake's not big enough for both Moose and me, then Moose will have to find himself another lake."

Which was all very pretty. But the next morning they gathered up their rods and baskets and made their way to the landing in anything but a vacation spirit. A crimson dawn was flooding through the woods. It made the lake as pink as though a pot of dye had been poured into it overnight, while Moose, squatted in a skiff tinkering with a motor, looked as if he had just been dipped in red himself. He climbed upon the wharf.

"Morning," he said awkwardly.

"How are yuh?" said Dugan, with some reserve.

Moose grinned.

"Pretty good—little stiff," he said, extending his hand. "No hard feelings, I reckon, is there?"

Dugan eyed him sharply, but shook the extended hand while Moose talked on rapidly, his gaze fixed on the plank-ing.

"I made the boss give me a day off," he said. "Thought maybe you'd like to have me take you over to Little Mascuppic. Fishing's good over there. We'll take an overboard motor. Easier'n paddlin'."

Dugan and Ole exchanged glances. Had Moose been knocked into a peni-

tent mood, or was he up to some new game? However, the invitation was so cordial that it was hard to refuse.

"Keep an eye on that baby," Dugan managed to whisper to Ole as they took seats amidship.

By the time Moose had superintended their passage over the carry at Oquossoc, however, it was pretty evident that he was a reformed young man. Not only the chips, but also a big load of responsibility seemed to have dropped from his shoulders. His tongue loosened, and soon he was yarn-ing about the local fauna and flora until he was as good as a guide at seven dollars a day.

They lowered the skiff into the waters of Little Mascuppic.

"A motor kinder skeers fish," said Moose, with the faintest suspicion of a twinkle. "I'll just row you down the lake a piece while you look at the scenery."

They skirted along a primitive wilderness. Huge, mossy boulders with weather-beaten trees wedged among them at queer angles were tumbled along the water's edge. Behind lay a growth of timber so dense that the light seemed scarcely to penetrate into it. The water was a black green. Moose rested noiselessly on his oars.

"Try a Silver Doctor along here," he whispered.

Not until some five hours later did they get a chance to draw Moose out. As the pangs of hunger began to assail them he unexpectedly produced a fry pan and a coffeepot, and suggested they go ashore. Now, after a meal of potatoes baked in the ashes and pink-fleshed trout fried over the coals, the disturbances of the three previous days had receded sufficiently into the past, as Dugan saw it, to be discussed amicably. He lit his pipe and settled down comfortably against a log.

"Moose," he said, "you sure know how to use your dukes."

The other poked the fire thoughtfully.

"Well," he drawled, "I don't know. I've had the gloves on a lot winters in logging camp—and sometimes we ain't bothered with gloves. See that scar?" he went on, pointing with some pride to a jagged red bar across his chin. "That's where a jack cleated me in a rough and tumble."

"You ought to make a real scrapper some day."

"Ought to?" he said. "By gum, I got to. I got a family dependent on me."

Dugan straightened up in disgust.

"Family?"

"Yep, and it's having darn tough sleddin'. You see, my old man twisted his spine in a drive two springs ago. Guess he ain't ever goin' to walk again. Then, besides him, I got two kid sisters."

Dugan looked across at him quizzically.

"Even so, what's the idea of pickin' on me?"

Moose hesitated, embarrassed.

"Suppose I got to tell you," he said. "In fact, that's what I got you out here for—to kind of make it right with you. You see, I been r'arin' to go down to Portland and see if I couldn't break into the fight game. Then I got to talkin' to a feller named Scudder who's rich as Cræsus. Maybe you saw him around the boathouse?"

Dugan and Ole nodded.

"Well, I been kind of decent to him. Done his errands for him and gone fishin' with him. So one day I got my nerve up, told him I hadn't a cent, and asked him if he wouldn't back me. He said he didn't believe I could scrap. Might scrap in the woods, he said, but I wouldn't stack up much against professionals. I told him I'd show him."

A grim smile played around Dugan's mouth.

"I get the idea. Was he satisfied?"

"Well, he said he'd loan me a thou-

sand, but he thought I ought to have licked you——”

Ole pointed at Dugan excitedly.

“Py yingo, young fella,” he exclaimed, “you know who he is?”

Moose nodded.

Dugan jumped to his feet.

“So you knew you was razing a champion into taking a crack at you? Kid, you got nerve!”

The same look of grim desperation they had noticed before crept into Moose's eyes.

“I got to make some money,” he repeated doggedly. “The family's flat busted. There ain't no money loggin'——”

“Hey, you, Moose,” said Dugan excitedly, “don't you go to Portland. You come back to New York with me. I'll

get Dan Stringer to manage you and we'll see you get started right. We'll play you up as ‘Sulky’ McWilliams, the ‘Battling Moose’!”

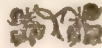
While Dugan's new protégé was washing the frying pan, Ole took the champion aside.

“I don't know, Pete,” he said gloomily. “Mebbe you bane helping a fella who will some time take the title away from you.”

Dugan looked at the long line of trout suspended between two young hemlocks. There were thirty-seven of them, not counting the three they had eaten for dinner. Twenty-four he had caught himself.

“Hell, Ole,” he grinned. “Let Moose have the title. He deserves it. Look at the day's fishing he's given us!”

Another story by Mark Reed will appear in this magazine soon.



HARPOONING MILLIONS OF DOLLARS

WHEN the women quit wearing stays and so put out of business the corset makers who had been paying five dollars a pound for whalebone, it was thought that a staggering blow had been dealt the ancient game of harpooning the Moby Dicks. The blow, however, did not materialize, and the whalers of to-day get rich. There are whaling captains who get thirty-five thousand dollars, and even as much as forty thousand dollars, for a season of nine months. One Norwegian whaling company reported that in 1926 its gross income was a little less than three million dollars.

The oil from the big fish was used in olden days for illuminating purposes. Now it is bought up by the manufacturers of grease for railroad locomotives, soaps, beauty creams, lard substitutes, and glycerin. From the carcasses of the giant cetaceans come also bone charcoal for sugar refining and ground dried meat for chicken feed, while from Canada the hides of white whales are exported to Scotland to be made into shoe strings.

Years ago the New Englander dominated the whaling business, but nowadays the Norwegians are the boss harpoon throwers of the world. This does not mean, however, that whaling is neglected in other quarters of the globe.

“At no stage in the history of the whale fisheries,” reports Lewis Radcliffe, Deputy Commissioner of the U. S. Bureau of Fisheries, “have whales been so harassed in so many parts of the world. Such improvements as the whale gun and the huge floating factories have greatly increased the efficiency of operations.” Eighteen thousand or more whales are killed every year, and Mr. Radcliffe is doubtful that the supply of big fellows will long stand up under such losses.

Counterfeit



By
**Robert J.
Pearsall**

Author of "Forced Down," Etc.

While Bledsoe, wanted for murder, was being sought for in the mountains and valleys, Sheriff Fraser, dozing before the jail, was awakened by a remarkable visitor.

A COMPLETE STORY

THE old catamount! The crazy old cuss! Must've gone—plumb loco. Or else—bogus—all the time. Fooled us, anyhow."

Thus mused Sheriff Fraser sadly, his thoughts coming slower and slower as he drowsed under the wooden awning of his quarters in front of the jail. For the moment, everything was peaceful in Paradise, Montana. The night shift of miners had gone up the hill, and the day shift had not yet come down. Dusk was settling; the blistering, shingle-warping heat of the day had passed; to the west, the untamed, rugged hills were purple and crimson and gold; and nothing of the town's sometimes hectic life reached the sher-

iff's ears but the blaring of a single hurdy-gurdy, softened considerably by the distance.

"That's it, I guess—bogus. Counte'-feit! But I'd 've sworn to him. I'd 've—sworn——"

With a final nod, the sheriff slept, chair tilted back against the wall. He'd been up most of the night before, following a report that his old friend, Bledsoe, now a fugitive wanted for murder, had been seen in the Cow Hollow district. His deputy was away chasing down another report, and would likely be back some time to-night. In a week, there'd been a dozen such rumors; but Bledsoe had proved as elusive as might have been expected of

an old cattleman, sheepman, and now mining foreman, who knew the country as he knew the palm of his hand.

A snuffling snore sounded from the jail back of the office. "Damn!" the sheriff grumbled, half waking. He hated the sound because he hated the man who made it. If Burson was going to sleep, he, Fraser, didn't want to. Somewhere in Paradise, whose nearest building was a long stone's throw down the slope behind the jail, a man laughed loudly. The sheriff grunted, raised his high-heeled boots to another chair, settled himself; and when presently there came the sound of a dislodged, tumbling pebble from the ravine to the west of the jail, he did not hear it.

About a minute later, a man crept out of the ravine. Lying flat, he raised his head a little, looking quickly toward the unpainted, straggling town, and then at the sleeping sheriff. His face, like the sheriff's, was lean, leathery, hard. His eyes were blue and puckered, with a clear, hard light. His corduroy breeches and flannel shirt had seen very hard usage. He was middle-aged, but all muscle and bone; and his general appearance fitted well the savage, saw-toothed mountains from which he had presumably come. In his holster hung a heavy revolver, which he hitched back a little before creeping, Indian fashion, across the short distance which separated the ravine from the jail.

The sheriff muttered something, and stirred uneasily. But the man was already at the corner of the building, and concealed from the town. Slowly, covering the sheriff, he raised himself to his six feet of height. His harsh voice barely carried across the space between them.

"Takin' it easy, sheriff. Jist yuh keep on a-doin' it, an' *be quiet about it.*"

At the first sentence, the sheriff opened his eyes. At the next, the front legs of his chair came creaking down,

but that was the extent of his disobedience. To judge from his staring eyes and his jaws agape, astonishment had as much to do with keeping him quiet as the other's revolver.

"Bledsoe! *Bledsoe!*" Even amazed as he was, he kept his voice low, with an ear cocked back to catch the continued snoring in the jail. The man in front of him had a swifter fate than a legal hanging to fear, if he were caught and the news of his capture got out, for his reputation was certainly black.

"Jist so. Murderer Bledsoe!" The man's voice was grim. "Heard yuh've been lookin' for me right hard, so I'm savin' yuh more trouble. 'Cause I've got a favor to ask of yuh, Sheriff Tom Fraser."

The sheriff continued to stare at Bledsoe, but with mounting color and angrily flexing jaw.

"Not a billy-be-damned favor!" he flared violently. "We've been friends for twenty years, but what yuh done ended all that sudden. Furthermore, yuh dassn't shoot, an' yuh can't keep that gun on me forever, an' when yuh turn your back— Oh, see here, Jack"—with a sudden softening—"what the blue blazes has gone wrong with yuh, anyway?"

"Not a darn thing." The outlaw regarded him quizzically. "I'm jist the same as I allus was. Also I know your duty an' all, an' I ain't hankerin' to have yuh slack on it, any more than yuh're hankerin' to put them cuffs on me that I see danglin' from your pocket. What I've come to ask yuh to do ain't goin' to hurt yuh none. Which is to say, first, I want yuh to turn that snorer outa there."

"But that snorer's Sam Burson."

"Jist so. I want him turned loose."

"Eh? Oh!" The sheriff's face hardened again. "So yuh can shoot him up. Why, yuh blasted fool, d'yuh s'pose—"

"Not that a-tall." But the outlaw's eyes had flashed. "But, see here, Tom, yuh don't really *want* Burson, do yuh?"

"Want him! The ornery hound! Every day he's been in there, feedin' at county expense, an' botherin' me with his snorin' an' sneerin' an' things, I've been wantin' to kick him out. But yuh know how it was; I got him locked up myself. Told him that if he ever beat up another Chinaman——"

"Yes, I know all about that. Makes it easier for yuh. If yuh got him locked up, yuh can turn him loose an' nobody'll kick. 'Specially if yuh put me there in his place."

"Put yuh in there! Yuh're surrenderin', Jack?" Again the sheriff stared at him with astonished eyes.

"Yes! Got tired of dodgin' posses, Tom. But I jist ain't hankerin' for Sam Burson's comp'ny."

"See here! I don't quite get yuh. Any other conditions to that offer?"

"Nary a condition. Except that Burson's ain't to know, an' nobody else till mornin'. From what I've heard while hidin' out, I'm liable to have a few callers, an' I'm too darn tired an' sleepy to entertain to-night."

"Yuh'll have callers, all right." For a moment, the sheriff studied Bledsoe with earnest curiosity. Counterfeit! Was his apparent sanity counterfeit, too? Surely he knew what his surrender meant!

Nothing in his life had amazed Sheriff Fraser more than Bledsoe's downfall. Nobody else was very much surprised, because in the new community which farming and mining had brought to the Paradise country, such men as Bledsoe were anomalies and suspiciously regarded. Fraser belonged to the same class, but was kept in office because he did manage to keep down crime. It was known that neither of their lives had been free from lawlessness, but lawlessness now meant plain crime.

Whereas, in the old days it meant simply—absence of law.

Till recently the two men's lives had paralleled curiously. They had known each other when both were rough-and-tumble cowboys, young rowdies of the saddle, of a class that had become as extinct as the wild bison and the blanket Indians. Later, they had both become cattle owners, making savage war against the sheepmen. Sheep won, and both swallowed their pride and bought—sheep.

Then came the homesteaders, edging in, and sheep lost. A bitter fight *that* had been, made disastrous by reduced tariff and a flood of foreign wool, and at the end both men were bankrupt. But neither had families, and both had got along well enough—Fraser becoming deputy sheriff and then sheriff, while Bledsoe advanced to a job as foreman in the silver mine up on the hill.

Then Bledsoe, six months ago, had done the distinguishing thing—he had married. Married a girl fifteen years younger than himself—Molly Shannon of the "Rusty Spoon." Fraser, confirmed bachelor, had grunted when he heard it. "No fool like an old fool," he said, and confidentially to his cronies prophesied disaster. Well, it had come soon enough.

Molly Shannon was all right, of course. Or at least, he hoped she was. Nothing about her, anyway, to change a good man into one who would murder an express agent in his bed, and make off with a five-thousand-dollar pay roll. Bledsoe must have been counterfeit all the time. But all the same, if it hadn't been for that marriage—Fraser wondered. Maybe she wanted things——

Bledsoe's guilt was certain enough. Not many guns nowadays of the old-fashioned caliber he carried, and with one of which the express agent had certainly been shot—but of course that

wasn't proof. Nor was the time tally of Bledsoe's shift, which had evidently been jerked from his pocket in the brief struggle—it might have been stolen and planted there. The things that couldn't have been planted were his boot tracks, partially but not wholly obliterated under the window, and leading straight away to the hills, from which he returned just in time to creep upon the posse gathering at his house, and to flee where he heard what had been discovered, and the talk of lynching. Molly had said he had been on an all-day hunting trip, and likely she thought that was true.

Young Papst had seen him running, and had fired at him. It was a miss, but the telltale boot tracks were along the trail Bledsoe had made in the brush. The sheriff looked down, and there they were again, in the dust behind Bledsoe. Damning, irregular patterns of hobnails and cleats, pounded in almost at random by the village shoemaker. He might turn out a million shoes and no two of them be the same.

Yes, Bledsoe had turned murderer—or had he always been one in his heart? Either way, it was strange enough. But not as strange as this surrender—and turning Burson loose! Young Burson had been Bledsoe's rival for Molly Shannon. And some folks said that he and she still—but, pshaw! Fraser wouldn't repeat gossip, even to himself. Anyway, he had something serious to say to Bledsoe.

"Yuh'll have callers," he repeated. "And they won't be friendly. Maybe I'm goin' against my duty to warn yuh before I get yuh behind lock an' key. But since yuh—well, since lasf week, people have been sort of workin' themselves up to the point where they maybe won't give yuh any trial. An' Hendricks is gone, leavin' only me. Well, what I propose is——"

"I get yuh, but to-night I'm goin' to rest. If nobody knows, nobody'll

bother, will they? In the mornin' yuh can take me anywhere yuh like."

"Well, I guess that's all right," said the sheriff reflectively. "But what's the plan of action right now? If I go in an' turn Burson loose, what surety have I got that yuh'll be here when I come back?"

"Well, yuh've my promise," said Bledsoe.

The sheriff looked at him. There had been a time when a promise from either would have been something for the other to stake his life on. Had that all been counterfeit, too? The sheriff reflected quickly that Bledsoe wished to surrender, and also that Bledsoe knew that Burson could easily be reimprisoned if his substitute fled. It was tough, having to figure whether Bledsoe would keep his word or not.

"It oughta be good," Fraser said.

Something was twitching at his mouth. He got up from his chair, turning his back on the outlaw with the gun; and, passing through his combination office and sleeping room, came outdoors again and, across a narrow space, to the door of the jail. This was a one-room structure, built entirely of logs, except for the roof, which had a sheet-iron lining. The single window and door were of heavy iron bars, which in the case of the window were set firmly into the logs. The door was secured by a heavy padlock and chain. A good, safe jail, practically escape proof, for whenever there was a prisoner, the sheriff, his assistant, or some one whom he deputized, slept in the nearly adjoining office.

The sheriff took out his keys and rattled the padlock, eying with disfavor the recumbent figure on a cot against the wall. "Hey, Burson!" he called.

Burson rolled over and sat up. He was handsome in a hard and insolent fashion; well dressed and debonair in spite of three weeks of jail. He yawned and stretched elaborately.

"What's the matter now, *Mister* Fraser? Can't you let a man sleep?"

"I might—a man," returned the sheriff satirically. "Come, get yourself outa there."

"What's the matter?"—with seeming vague alarm.

"Nothin', only I decided to turn yuh loose."

"Oh!" The exclamation was plainly joyous; but then with quick dissimulation, Burson was his languid and indifferent self again. He slouched across the room.

"Well, this *is* a surprise. Got tired of my comp'ny, eh? Sort of enjoyed the stay myself, though I missed a lot of excitement. Murder an' robbery an' all—Paradise gettin' real interestin'. Is old man Bledsoe caught yet? Shouldn't think he could stand much chasin'—must be near as old as you are. Excuse me, sheriff. I don't mean——"

"Get outa here!" rasped the sheriff.

With smoldering eyes, he watched Burson go. And yet Fraser was a little ashamed of his feelings. Funny how Burson always got his wrath up. Probably he wasn't any worse than any of the other Paradise loafers. Only he did have that habit of beating up Chinamen when he got on a toot. A cruel, cowardly trick, that! That last time, though, he hadn't even been drunk—not really so. It was just to defy the sheriff, who had told him he would jail him the next time it happened. Seemed like he wanted to get locked up.

With that dismissal, Fraser closed the jail door, passed through his office again, and out to where he'd left Bledsoe. Bledsoe was waiting, and it seemed to the sheriff that his face had got even harder and sterner in the last few minutes. He still had his gun, but before the sheriff could ask for it, he extended it, butt forward.

"Here's a toot I won't be usin' any more," he said

Fraser, though pretty well hardened by life, shuddered just a little as he took the weapon. Tough and cruel had been Bledsoe's last use of it! Fraser started to speak, thought better of it, and marched Bledsoe through the office and into the jail. He turned the key in the padlock, removed it, and stood hesitant a moment. Then he suggested: "Maybe there's somebody you'd like to see? Maybe—your wife?"

"Not a single, identical person," said Bledsoe. "All I want to do is to sleep."

Well, that was done. Fraser returned to his office and sat down on one of the cots. It was nearly dark now, but no use to light a lamp. Suddenly he felt very tired—an old man. He and Bledsoe had been very close. Sighing, he began to remove his boots. So Bledsoe didn't want to see his wife. Now, why was that? Women—you couldn't tell about 'em. Had Bledsoe discovered that? But whatever he'd discovered—he was counterfeit. Molly—counterfeit, too, maybe. Sleep? He *hoped* he could sleep. But it would probably take a long time.

As a matter of fact, it took a very short time indeed. The tumult of hurdy-gurdy music, singing and shouting had hardly begun in Paradise before Fraser dropped off. He was so tired that for hours he slept soundly, but then he began to dream and mutter uneasily. In his dream, the citizens of Paradise, led by Sam Burson, were taking Bledsoe out to hang him, while some queer paralysis held Fraser from stirring a finger to prevent it. Then, in spite of his inaction, some of them laid hands on Fraser. They were going to hang him, too, for being Bledsoe's friend. He struggled awake and discovered that some one actually was shaking his shoulder. The lamp was lighted. It was his deputy, Hendricks.

"Hey! Wake up! I want to tell yuh—Burson's gone."

The sheriff sat up, rubbing his eyes, disgruntled. Burson gone! Of course he was. Now he supposed he'd have to tell Hendricks the reason why—break his word to Bledsoe to that extent. But —Burson gone! Funny that was the extent of Hendrick's comment! He must have seen that Bledsoe was taken.

"Yes. I turned him loose."

"Oh! All right! Sorry I woke yuh, then. Only when I looked in an' see the cot empty——"

"Empty! Eh? What's that?"

"Sure. Empty. Wouldn't be anything else."

"You mean to say——" The sheriff faltered, checked himself.

"What's the matter? Didn't jug nobody else, did you?"

"I should say so! Wait a minute."

The sheriff jumped out of bed and, in his underclothes, ran out through the back door. He came back, cursing softly.

"Hendricks, I'm afraid there's the devil to pay. I've been buncoed."

"Eh? What d'ye mean?"

The sheriff started putting on his clothes. In four sentences, he told Hendricks how Bledsoe had surrendered conditional on Burson's release. At the end, from Hendrick's knowing look, he realized he didn't have to put into words his own conviction of Bledsoe's purpose. Hendricks, too, knew of the talk concerning Burson and Bledsoe's wife.

"There's only one way Bledsoe could 've got out," the sheriff went on. "He must've had a key to fit the padlock, an' managed some way to work his hands through the bars an' use it. Must've slipped up some night an' made an impression of the keyhole, an' then filed out the key: I've heard of such things, but I didn't think that Bledsoe—— But that doesn't matter."

"Naw! The thing that matters is—— But I thought yuh said that he gave up his gun?"

"There's plenty other guns. He wouldn't need a gun to finish Burson, anyway. If that's all he's done——"

The two men looked at each other, appalled.

"Gosh! He wouldn't kill Molly, too!" cried the deputy.

"Yuh can't tell about such things. If he found that Molly was counte'feit—— He was always a hand for doin' things *complete*. An' by hisself. We used to call him 'Solitaire Jack'—the way he'd figure out things an' do 'em. But allus right—what's that?"

"What's what?"

"I thought I heard somethin'. Guess it was a rock slippin' in the gulch. Course, maybe he was just after Burson. Even if he was, he'd have planned to get him outa jail. He'd have planned to give him some chance or—— Lord, I'm forgettin'! He didn't give the express agent any, did he?"

"Not unless boots lie, which they don't. Looks like he wanted to follow Burson an' catch him."

"Say, I do hear somethin'. Sounds like it's in the jail."

"'Tisn't in there, anyway," said the deputy, grinning. "People break outa them places sometimes, but they don't break in. You most ready?"

"Wait till I get my gun on. We'd better go to Bledsoe's house, though we won't find him there. I kind of hate to think what we may find."

Sheriff and deputy started for the door.

"Yuh won't find nobody there but Molly," came a voice from behind them.

The sheriff whirled, his gun popping forward. His eyes popped, too; he'd had several surprises the last few hours, but this was the biggest of all. Bledsoe had entered by the rear door. He stood with a grim smile on his lean, hard face, and in his hands were a pair of boots.

"Lucky, ain't I? Just in time to save

you takin' that trip. Boots don't lie, says everybody? Well, I've got a little exhibit. Lemme show yuh somethin' right quick, so yuh can rest your hands from holdin' them guns on me."

In spite of himself, a trace of exultation broke into his voice. His eyes traveled about the room until they rested on a newspaper. He tore a single sheet from the paper, spread it on the floor, and then stood on it, his feet close together. Carefully lifting his feet, he showed the tracks of his hobnails and cleats penetrating the paper.

"Them's what condemned me," he said. "Them's what couldn't be planted, yuh all agreed when I was listenin' to yuh the night of the killin'. Now let's take a look at these."

He stooped, placed the shoes he was holding on the paper, and put his weight upon them. Under the sheriff's glowing eyes, he lifted them, and plain beside the first tracks were others that were identical.

"I ain't blamin' yuh for not thinkin' of it, 'cause I never heard of it bein' done before; but after all, 'twa'n't so much of a trick to drive in hobnails an' cleats the same as in my boots. An' I know'd somebody'd done it, 'cause I hadn't made them tracks. Furthermore, thinks I, there's only one man that might want to get me outa the way, 'cause of certain mistaken ideas he might have. An', thinks I again, bein' in jail is a mighty fine alibi, an' he sure entered here voluntary. All he'd need was an easy way in an' out, which I discovered by investigatin' one night."

"As how, Jack?" inquired the sheriff softly.

"Just a section of a lower log sawed loose, when there was nobody in the

jail an' you an' Hendricks was away. Took some work, I reckon, but 'twas easy enough to do."

"Still old Solitaire Jack," said the sheriff, eying him. "But yuh was a fool, all the same. Why didn't yuh——"

"Why didn't I surrender an' tell about it? Well, I thought of doin' it, specially after I found these here boots under the floor of Burson's shack. But I figured I needed somethin' else. Anybody might've sawed the log, an' I might've fixed the boots myself. The thing that was needed was to catch Burson goin' to the place where he'd hid the money. I figured he'd visit it the minute he was turned loose, to see if 'twas still there an' to gloat over it, bein' that kind of a cuss."

"An' yuh followed him, eh?"

"Not me. How could I follow him, bein' as yuh was lockin' me up? No, I fixed it up with Molly to do that—she watched him from the minute he got outa jail. Then we met at a place where we'd agreed, an' she told me where the money is—under some rocks back in Crookneck Gulch. It's still there, with plenty of his handprints in the dirt, I guess, an' they ain't quite so easy to counterfeit as boot tracks. But anyway, I reckon yuh'll believe Molly."

There had come a note of greater joy than that of personal vindication in Bledsoe's voice, and the look that he bent on his old friend had in it more of triumph than questioning.

"I reckon so," said the sheriff. "Guess you're lucky, after all. Where d'yuh s'pose Burson is now?"

"Jist thought I'd save yuh some trouble, so I collared him on the way in. He's all trussed up an' hog tied, back in that colander of a jail."

Another story by Robert J. Pearsall will appear shortly.



Sunset House

In Four Parts
Part 4

By **George Marsh**

Author of "Breed of the Wolf," Etc.

The powerful conclusion of a truly stirring tale of stalwart men and a fascinating girl of the Northern woods and snows.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW BIG MEDICINE IS MADE.

YOU foxy old devil! You deserve the Victoria Cross!"

For the twentieth time Jim hugged the lean frame of the grinning Esau, as they stood at their camp fire.

"You knew before we left the post that Jingwak was this Makwa, without ears, whom you had run out of Wolf Rivière years ago. But how did you find it out? You never saw him."

"W'en I hear dat Jingwak and Paradesse scare de hunter from Sunset House wid devil story, I remember dat ees de same talk dis Makwa mak' at de Wolf Rivière. Den some Indian tell me dat Jingwak wear hees hair ver' long. Makwa would do dat to hide de ear he lose, ah-hah! W'en de people, here, tell me w'at he look lak'—den I know he ees Makwa."

"And you played him like a master! That was your father's conjuring outfit you wore. I remember it; you showed it to me, once."

"My fader was beeg shaman of de Four Medicine Lodge of de Mid-ewiwin," laughed the old unbeliever in sorcery. "He show me all de trick, but he navaire tak' de ear off widout blood. Dat was de beeg magic!"

"Big magic? Wait till the story reaches Pipestone and the South. They'll have you taking off his head instead of his ears. I guess Andrew Christie's eyes'll open when he sees the fur you'll get for us by this night's work." And the grateful Jim again hugged the old man whose smoke-tanned face, like old leather, beamed with his content.

"Good t'ing Esau take off hees ear," grunted Omar through his pipestem, his eyes snapping. "I cut out Makwa's



heart for sure, eef anyting happen to dat great shaman, Otchig."

"'Otchig, the strange shaman from the West!'" chuckled Jim. "You clever rascal! When Jingwak saw that the man who took his ears at Wolf River had called his bluff, he hung to that lodge of his like a fox to his hole! Do you suppose he had guessed before this who you were?"

"Mebbe so. Jinaw say dat Paradese look hard for me before eet grow dark. I know he do dis, so I land on oder side an' cross de island tru de bush."

"Well, whether Jingwak knew who you were or not, he was afraid of you, and Paradis would never have let you perform if he had found you before the show started. Of course, when you finally appeared, he didn't dare interfere. The Ojibwas had come for a thrill—and they surely got it. So did I."

"Ah-hah!" Omar reached with a thick arm and patted Esau on the shoulder, as a grin split his square face from ear to ear. "Paradese navaire stop dat great shaman, Otchig, from mak' hees medicine wid Omar to fight for heem."

"I certainly thought we'd have to fight, Esau. Why didn't you tell me about this Jingwak?"

"I had fear he was not Makwa."

"Did you cut off his ears?"

"No, wan good frien' of me, at de Wolf Rivière—he do dat," replied the old man, and he met Jim's incredulous grin with the guileless look of a child.

"And you ran those rapids?"

Esau told of his meeting with Paradis and his men which had forced him into the Rapids of the Windigo.

"How you got through, the Lord only knows! And you did it for me!"

The eyes of the old man were bright with emotion. "For you and your fader. I tell heem w'en he goin' to die, not worry. I tak' care Jeem."

"And you have—you and Omar! Bless your old bones!"

"Umh!" grunted Omar bitterly. "But I let dat Paradese get away!"

In the morning the Peterboro from Sunset House started on the long trail south. At the tepee of Jinaw, Jim left the bulk of his flour, sugar and tea, for the Rattlesnake had earned the enduring friendship of the men who had once suspected him.

"Look!" cried the grinning old woman, as Jim removed the bandage from the fast-healing wound. "It is now like the other; the devils have gone!"

"Yes," said Jim, "the pain devils have followed Jingwak's ears."

Up the great lake on the way to the inlet traveled the canoe, past ridges flicked with the yellow and gold of frost-touched birch and poplar and balm of Gilead. As the Peterboro leaped to the *churn-swish* of three paddles, driven as only men who are homeward bound can push them, the swift whip of short wings sounded overhead. A family of five loons had taken the air, to answer the call of far waters. Soon the garrulous vanguards of the geese would map the sky, riding the first stinging winds from the bay. An interval of mellow days—the early Indian summer of the Far North—would companion the canoe up the Sturgeon to the Pipestone Lakes, but before the voyageurs saw Sunset House the Moon of the Falling Leaves would wane, the first flurries of the long snows whiten the valleys, and the coves of the lakes and the backwaters of the rivers film with ice.

At the foot of the big rapids of the Sturgeon, Jim looked for, and found, the footprints of Smoke. The absence of rain, and the dropping of the river, had left the last traces of the friend he had lost as clear cut as on the day after the fight on the portage.

"Good-by, Smoke!" said Jim, gazing through eyes blurred by many a poignant memory at the footprints of the dog he had fed from puppyhood. "Jim

never had a better friend than you. All you had you gave him, and now he's going home without his dog. Good-by, Smoke!"

CHAPTER XXV.

HOME-COMING.

HARD as they had raced the coming winter south through the Pipestone Lakes, long since deserted by the Indians, the men from Sunset House found that the moccasin telegraph had been even more swift. For one day, as they followed the inlet of the last of the chain, they overtook a canoe. Anxious to speed the news of Jingwak's downfall, Omar ran the Peterboro alongside the traveling birchbark. At his mention of the defeat of the sorcerer and his friend Paradis, the men in the boat nodded in affirmation.

"Otchig, the great shaman from God's Lake, took his ears," said the older Indian. "Jingwak is a liar. He has left the country."

"Otchig now lives at the Lake of the Sand Beaches," announced Omar. "Do the Ojibwas believe he lives with devils?"

The Indian shook his head. "It was the lie of Jingwak and Paradis, the trader. In the Little Moon of the Spirit I and my sons will journey to the House of the Sunset with our fur."

When the Peterboro had passed from earshot of the other craft, Omar asked his friends: "How dey hear dat so soon?"

"A canoe must have started for the Pipestones that night. Why didn't you tell them that Esau was the great shaman, Otchig?" demanded Jim.

Omar frowned at the lack of astuteness in his chief. "Dey breeng dat fur to us Creešmas to have a look at de great shaman. I not tell dem dey look at heem now, w'en dey got no skin to trade."

"Omar, you're a statesman! You're wasted in the bush; you ought to be in

Ottawa," insisted Jim, while Esau nodded in approval.

Then, between the Pipestones and home, the first batallions of the geese, fleeing the freezing winds, filled the nights with their clamor, and hard on their heels came the snow. Each morning breaking a path with their poles through the heavier film of ice of the dead waters, riding the thinner sheets with a pounding bow, the voyageurs raced the winter south.

At last, one windy October day, when swirls of fine snow beat round the buildings of Sunset House, and the black lake churned into wind-driven foam, three white shapes, driving paddles sheathed with ice, brought the canoe in to the beach.

"*Nia! nia!*" cried the excited Sarah, opening the door for the half-frozen Jim. "You are back! All well?"

Jim patted the broad back of the solicitous Ojibwa. "Cold and hungry, Sarah!" he laughed, the ice on his eyebrows melting before the heat of the kitchen stove, to which she peremptorily hustled him.

"Ah, you not get hurt by dose wild 'Jibwa? Good!" sputtered the bustling Sarah, brushing the melting snow from Jim's coat.

"No, we've won, Sarah! We've beaten Paradis!"

"*Nia! n'go!* You find de shaman, Jingwak?" cried the startled cook, her small eyes, black as buttons, snapping with excitement.

"Yes, Esau's medicine was too strong for him." And while Sarah's flat face sobered, for she was superstitious, and her wide mouth gaped in wonder, Jim told of the magic at the Medicine Stone. But he failed to disclose the secret of Esau's miraculous power. The wagging tongues of Sarah and Marthe were not to be trusted, when the Indians arrived for the Christmas trade. Concerning this, the lips of the three friends were sealed.

While Sarah busied herself with a hot supper for her returned master, Jim stepped across to the trade house. He closed the slab door against the drive of wind and light snow, to find Omar and Esau smoking beside the sheet-iron stove.

"Somet'ing dere for you," announced the half-breed with a nod of his black head toward the trade counter.

On the hand-hewn spruce planks lay a white envelope.

Aurore! She had written before she went South, and had sent the letter by an Indian! Jim's tanned face was radiant with the joy of the surprise. His eager fingers reached for the letter, addressed in a bold hand to "Mr. James Stuart, Sunset House."

Her writing! He had never seen it! Aurore had left him her first love letter!

Conscious of the scrutiny of two pairs of black eyes at the stove, Jim thrust the letter, unread, into his pocket and left the room with a mumbled: "I'm starved—goin' to eat!"

Loath to read the letter before the curious eyes of his men, Jim crossed to his quarters and entered the living room. "She hasn't forgotten; she's written me! And I've won, Aurore! I've come back, black-eyed sorceress of mine; they can't take you away from me, now!" he said aloud, his voice thick with emotion, as he opened the letter:

DEAR JIM: You've been gone three weeks and I've been so lonely, oh, so lonely for the big gray-eyed boy who made love so beautifully that day, years ago, on the island.

Then a look, dazed, uncomprehending, drove the joy from the factor's eyes as he read:

But if you had cared for me as I loved you, you couldn't have gone away. You couldn't have held what you called your duty above love. Every day I have gone alone, somewhere, to fight this thing out, and I always find the same answer. I know now

that yours is not the mad love I've dreamed of—a love which counts no cost, knows no law. No, Jim, we made a mistake—you and I. But it was beautiful—that day of ours on the island. I'll never forget it.

Good-by, Jim!

AUORE.

The unseeing eyes of Stuart lifted to stare out at the fast-darkening lake. His nerveless fingers opened and the letter fell to the floor.

It had come like a knife thrust in the dark. With his heart quick with love for her she had struck him.

So it had been make-believe, that day on the island? Her eyes, her lips, had lied. For the pleasure of an August day her vanity had demanded the soul of a man, to destroy. Had he stayed, it would have been no different; she would have played the game, and then, as now, cast him aside. After all, there was no heart in her. Red blood, charm, reckless courage, yes; but heart, there was none.

His lips curled bitterly at the memory of her radiant face, her kisses. Again her arms circled his neck in parting. The scent of her dark hair was in his nostrils.

But to wound him this way! Leave this farewell for a man who had toiled and fought through the weeks with only the thought of her, the love of her, to buoy him!

Her first letter—and her last!

There was a sound of shuffling moc-casins at the door of the room where the tall figure of Jim Stuart stood motionless in the dusk with his grief. The flickering light of a candle penetrated the shadows.

"Meester Jeem!"

The solicitous voice of Sarah roused Stuart from the blackness of his despair.

With a deep breath he turned to see her standing with lifted candle, staring in amazement at the neglected letter on the floor.

"She send you dat lettair?" gasped

the perplexed Indian. "You not want eet?"

With the look of a wounded animal Jim met her uncomprehending gaze.

"She does not want me, Sarah."

The small eyes in the broad face glittered, as the copper skin of the Ojibwa darkened with sudden anger. Putting down the candlestick, she shuffled to the kitchen, to return directly, carrying a crimson scarf. Dramatically she flung it to the floor and stamped on it.

"Tajimadji!" She rasped out the familiar expletive of her native tongue. "She geeve me *dat*!" And the furious Sarah spat at the once-treasured gift of Aurore LeBlond.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. CHRISTIE IS SURPRISED.

LATE in the night the body which days of drudgery with pole and paddle in the race against the freeze-up had numbed with weariness brought the surcease of sleep to the tortured brain of Jim Stuart. It had been a will-o'-the-wisp, a phantom—the vision of the girl which had companioned him into the heart of Kiwedin. He had had his dream, beautiful while it lasted, and now he once more faced reality.

In the trade room, the following morning, Esau, Omar, and Jim sat in a council of war.

"Did LeBlond send Paradis to the Sturgeon country?" demanded Jim of his smart counselors, who scowled in thought as their mouths emitted smoke like wet wood. "And if we think he did, do we face him with it or lie low?"

With a long draw at his pipe, Omar filled his capacious mouth with smoke, and slowly emptied it, before replying: "We lie lak' de fox een hees hole."

Esau nodded in agreement.

"I think that's the game," agreed Jim. "If he thinks Paradis went to Nipigon he won't hear what happened at Sturgeon Lake until the Christmas

trade. Now Esau and I start north to get the early fur the first week in December. We'll need two more dog teams. We'll start this morning, Omar, for Expanse, and bring them up on the first sledding."

Omar stared in amazement at his chief. "De cano' weel freeze een, for sure. Een two-tree week we can travel de ice wid de dog," he demurred.

Jim's face darkened. "You're not afraid of being caught by the ice?"

With a shrug of his heavy shoulders the half-breed rose and knocked out his pipe. "All right, we go now wid de wind behind us."

Down the Lake of the Sand Beaches through the gray October day traveled the canoe, seeking to reach the post far to the south before the waterways closed, while the silent stern man wondered what new folly swayed the mind of the man whose paddle tore at the sullen black water. Not stopping to boil the kettle, for the dusk would drive them ashore to an early supper, the measured cadence of the *churn-swish* of ice-filmed paddles was the only sound to beat out the hours.

On to the Woman River went the canoe, while the winter hovered but did not strike—hovered to whiten the laboring canoemen with snow flurries and stiffen their fingers with cold while their hot breaths rose like steam. Breaking a lane with their poles through the half-inch ice sheathing the winding inlet of Expanse, the voyageurs, who had barely nosed out ahead of the fast following freeze-up, at last paddled in to the beach at the headquarters of the company.

At their appearance in the door of the trade house, the whiskered jaw of Andrew Christie dropped. His pale-blue eyes squinted through the steel-rimmed glasses as though he stared at white wraiths instead of men.

"Well, I'll be skinned!"

"Good day, Mr. Christie," said Jim casually. "There was a matter of busi-

ness that couldn't wait for sled travel, so Omar and I took a chance."

As the inspector perfunctorily gave Jim a gripless hand, his face betrayed curiosity mingled with disapproval.

"Business, eh? It's about time there was some business between yeh and me besides freighting yeh supplies to be et up by yer people while the fur goes to LeBlond. Well, what's the business that brings yeh in the freeze-up? Man, yeh're crazy!"

Jim met the usual Christie wail with a complaisant smile. "I've come for two dog teams."

"Dog teams!" Andrew Christie raised bony hands in protest. "Two dog teams! So ye wasted all this time comin' to Expanse, thinkin' I'll let yeh have two teams, did yeh?"

"No, I've wasted no time, for I'm going back with the teams," Jim grinned into the purpled face of his irritable superior, while Omar turned away to hide his amusement.

"Now when, Mr. Jim Stuart," stormed the angered Christie, "did yeh become inspector of this district?"

"You gave me a year in which to double my trade, didn't you?"

"Yes! And I don't mind tellin' yeh that yer successor's been picked."

Jim's wind-burned face stiffened. For an instant the deep-set gray eyes grew dark with the anger he fought to control. "This," he thought—"this is my reward for losing her."

Then, buttressed with the knowledge of his sure victory, he said mildly: "Thanks for your expression of confidence."

Evidently ashamed of the frank speaking into which his anger had led him, Christie compromised with: "What in thunder d'yeh want of these dogs?"

Briefly Jim told of his promise to the Indians to visit the Pipestone Lakes in early December.

"So ye've been up there this fall, eh?"

"Yes."

"Find out why they bin keeping away from yeh?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"It's a long story. I'll tell you later. Do I get the dogs, Mr. Christie?"

"Well, if yeh can't get 'em down for the Christmas trade, I suppose ye'll have to go after 'em."

"So, it's agreed I get two dog teams?"

"Yes."

"Thanks. I think I'll drop over and see Mary."

"Ahem!"

The inspector scratched his bearded chin as he coughed. He seemed embarrassed, to the man who waited for him to speak.

"I—I wouldn't bother Mary—now. Ahem!" Again he cleared his throat. "Y'see, she's always thought pretty well of yeh—but we've had some news. She—ye'd better wait and go over to supper with me."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A STUNNING BLOW.

WHAT could she have heard?" Jim wondered, as he followed Christie into the house. "Poor Mary, if she only knew the truth!"

But the desolation in his heart numbed him to indifference to the attitude of the daughter of Andrew Christie. It mattered little to Jim Stuart what rumor the moccasin telegraph had brought from Mitawangagama.

Grave-faced, she met him at the door and gave him an unresponsive hand, patently avoiding his eyes. And when she had served the men their supper, she returned to the kitchen. Doubtless a highly colored version of the rescue of Aurore and his trip with Omar and Pierre to LeBlond's had reached Expanse. In his misery, however, he ignored her coolness.

After supper, in the trade house, when he told of the ambush on the Woman River and of the banishment of

Paradis, the red face of Christie beamed with satisfaction.

"Now we've got something to hold over Meester LeBlond!" chuckled the inspector, rubbing his bony hands.

"Yes, but I don't think he knew anything about this ambush."

"Maybe not; but I've me own idea about that. Now yeh say yeh learned up on the Pipestones what's been keeping the trade from yeh?"

Behind a cloud of tobacco smoke the small eyes of Omar twinkled as he waited eagerly for Jim's reply.

"Why, the friendly Indians told us that Sunset House was supposed to be pestered with evil spirits—devils!"

"Well, I'll be skinned!" The thin-lipped mouth of Christie stretched in a loud laugh. "Deevils! That's pretty good!" One pale-blue eye closed under a bushy brow. "Since yeh fished that good-lookin' girl of LeBlond's outa the lake and sneaked over under her father's nose to spend the day with her, I figured there was a deevil among the weemen up there. But evil spirits!"

Jim's cold eyes met the other's smirk. So Aurore's Indian girl had talked? This was what Mary had heard.

"Paradis spread the tale through a medicine man that the place was haunted," Stuart explained, ignoring the insinuating grin of his chief. "But Esau convinced them that it was simply a trick to get the trade."

This was Jim's sole report of the Odyssey of the three friends to the Sturgeon valley, and many a new moon was to swing above the white desert of Lake Expanse before Andrew Christie heard the story. Until the pelts of the Pipestone and the Sturgeon country packed the fur loft of Sunset House, the lips of three men were closed.

When the ice grew strong enough for sledding on the great lake, and the snow deepened in the forest, Jim and Omar would start back with the dogs; until then, they were held prisoners at

the post. Night after night the starlit trail of the "Freezing Moon" of the Ojibwas glittered with a greater intensity as the young ice split under the increasing frost. Long since the laggard rearguards of the armies of the geese had passed south on their clamoring pilgrimage. Then, one windless day, a lead-hued sky blanketed the sun and the air slowly went white. The "long snows" had come.

By the early dusk six inches had fallen. Outside the trade house two toboggan sleds, their loads covered with tarpaulin wrappers and lashed, waited for the early start, before dawn, under the stars.

At Christie's house, Jim, the clerk, McComb, and the inspector sat at their supper. Following her custom, Mary had served the men and retired to the kitchen.

"Yeh have plenty of fish on yer cache, Stuart?" demanded Christie. "Two extra teams'll make a hole in yer supply and I don't want my dogs underfed."

"We made a big haul of whitefish and lake trout this fall; there's plenty. I'll have your dogs back here in good shape before Chris——"

"What's all that noise about over at the trade house?" broke in McComb.

The three men stopped eating to listen.

"I hear dog bells," said Jim, rising. "Don't suppose they've sent a packet through from the railroad?"

"That's just what it is," agreed Christie, rising with a mouth full of food.

Leaving the house, the three men walked through the falling snow toward the yellow glow of the trade-house windows. In front of the building the post dogs circled and snarled around a panting team, whose driver held off Christie's huskies with a heavy whip while he talked to two company Indians.

"Mail packet!" Jim surmised. "She'll get my letter, then, next week."

While the driver led his tired dogs off to be fed, the mail pouch was brought into the trade room and eagerly opened. Besides company mail on business matters for Expanse and outlying posts, there would be personal letters, papers, and a magazine or two; and the men marooned in the forest two hundred miles north of the railroad impatiently watched Christie open the leather bag.

Hoping against the inevitable, Jim waited as the inspector, squinting leisurely at the addresses, went through the pile of letters and papers dumped on the trade counter. Pitying him, possibly regretting the raw brutality of the note she had sent to Sunset House, Aurore might have written—might even have softened toward the man she had so suddenly thrust from her life. He waited, hands desperately clenched, his heart stifling him with its beating. Then he stiffened as Christie picked up the last letter.

"Hum! Miss Joan McCoy, Jackfish."

Jim turned away to hide his disappointed face from the light of the lamp. She had done with him. He was a fool to think that Aurore LeBlond carried pity in that wild heart of hers, pity for a former plaything of a fur trader buried far in the forest. Opening the sheet-iron stove, he dropped the letter he had written into the flames.

They returned to the inspector's quarters where Christie and McComb greedily read papers weeks old, while Stuart smoked apart with his thoughts.

He had finished his pipe and was about to turn in for the sleep he would need before the early start, when he suddenly looked up to surprise Mary Christie watching him from the doorway leading to the kitchen. The eyes of the girl, which for days had worn the cold indifference of a stranger, were now soft with pity—gentle with the sympathy of a friend.

She beckoned to him, and rising, ill at

ease, he followed her to the kitchen, where she closed the door. Then he noticed that she held a Winnipeg paper.

Without a word Mary handed the sheet to the man who vainly strove to fathom her swift change of mood.

"I'm so sorry, Jim," she said quietly, "that it has come to you as well as to me."

He glanced at the sheet he held in his hands, and there, laughing up at him, was the face of Aurore LeBlond.

Under it he read:

Miss Aurore LeBlond, daughter of Louis LeBlond, of the Northwest Trading Company, who is to marry Bruce MacLauren, well-known Winnipeg business man.

Jim let the paper slide to the floor. So it was MacLauren, all the time? MacLauren, the smooth city man, her father's financial backer. While the three from Sunset House went north to search for Jingwak, MacLauren had wasted no time with the girl who doubted the love of a man who could leave her.

Her eyes soft with compassion, Mary Christie watched the stricken face of Stuart.

After a space, he raised his eyes to hers. "Thank you, Mary," he said thickly. "We're getting an early start. I think I'll—turn in."

Insensible to his surroundings, like one in a dream, he stood staring at the floor; then, with a deep breath, said: "Good night. Good-by, Mary!"

Like a blind man he groped his way from the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A LETTER WITHOUT STAMPS.

UNDER bitter stars the two dog teams jingled out of the post clearing to the lake ice. As they left the shore and took the snowed-over trail up the purple plain of Lake Expanse to the mouth of the Woman River, Jim

glanced back at the huddle of dark buildings. From the second floor of the inspector's house a window shone yellow through the dusk. It was the room of Mary Christie.

"She's sorry, poor girl," he thought. "She's saying good-by—telling me she's sorry. Bless her big heart!"

He stopped and waved his hand, wondering if she could see him out there in the starlight; then, with his soul filled with bitterness, turned and followed his trotting dogs.

A week later Jim, Esau, and Migwan, with three loaded sleds, left Sunset House bound for the Pipestone Lakes, while Omar remained at the post to prepare for the Christmas trade. Day by day, on the way north, Jim broke trail through the new snow in front of the laboring teams, and, later, sat by the roaring fire before their shed tent, companioned by the memory of the girl who had so strangely drifted into his life and so swiftly left it. Night after night the hurt which tortured his days waked him with the poignancy of the dreams it brought. And, after supper, as he conjured up the face of Aurore in the fire which held his brooding eyes, often, from old habit, his hand instinctively groped for the furry ruff, the pointed ears on the massive skull of Smoke lying beside him, to meet no touch of a moist nose, no lick of a warm tongue. He had lost them both—the two creatures he loved.

At the Lake of the Great Stones old Jinaw, who had acted as his agent, waited at a large camp of hunters for Jim's sleds loaded with trade goods. In two days Stuart and Esau turned south with more black and silver fox, lynx, and marten than had reached Sunset House the previous year. And, according to Jinaw, the bulk of the Christmas trade was yet to come, as the hunters with good dogs preferred to make the trip to the post for the New Year's feast and the week of gossip and trad-

ing which marks the season in the fur country.

"Christie's eyes'll stick out of his head when he sees the fur we send to Expanse after Christmas," Jim said triumphantly to Esau. "We've got more than double the value of last year's trade on the sleds right now." He patted the old man's shoulder affectionately. "And you are responsible for it."

Esau's seamed face beamed in his pleasure. "Your fader, he feel happy, now, to know dat Sunset House get de fur, ah-hah!"

The man who carried a wound no material success could heal smiled at the quaint fancy of the loyal old Ojibwa. "Yes, father will be happy now. He knew he left Jim in good hands."

Through the dusk of one starless night, three trail-weary teams of huskies left the lake ice and turned into the clearing where the candle-lit windows of Sunset House beckoned. Warned by the yelping of the dogs, Omar threw open the trade-house door and hurried to the sleds with welcoming "*Bo'-jo's*." At Jim's quarters, the square shape of the happy Sarah suddenly appeared silhouetted in the doorway.

"You get de fur?" demanded Omar, peering at the sled wrappings.

"Heaps of it, Omar!" cried Jim. "Jinaw and old Zotaire are bringing the whole hunt of the country with them Christmas. "We've got LeBlond licked to a standstill!"

When the sleds were unloaded at the trade-house door and the dogs fed, the hungry and tired factor of Sunset House sought his supper. In his kitchen he found Sarah busy over a pan of sizzling moose steaks.

"*Bo'-jo', bo'-jo',* Meester Jeem!" cried the red-faced cook, brandishing a fork in one hand as she welcomed Stuart with the other. "You home all safe? You make de beeg trade, ah-hah? I hear you tell Omar. But you breeng

back de face so thin. Sarah, she feed you up." Then, with a questioning look of her snapping black eyes, she asked, as she nodded toward the living room: "You see noding een dere?"

"No. What d'yuh mean?"

Sarah's flat face divided in a wide grin. "You look!"

Curious, Jim walked into the living room. There on the table lay one of his own envelopes. Casually he picked it up. On the envelope he read his own name in the handwriting of Aurore LeBlond.

Dazed, mystified, Jim stared at the paper he held in his shaking hand.

"Sarah!"

The Ojibwa stood in the room, her black eyes on the twitching face of the man who stared at the unopened letter.

"How did this get here?"

The Indian shook her head. "You look and see. You know den."

Jim studied the envelope. What could it mean? What trick were they playing on him now? She was at Winnipeg and yet here was her handwriting on one of his own envelopes, without address or stamp.

He turned angrily on the woman who waited. "Who brought this? Why don't you tell me? What's the——" The complaisant smile of the Ojibwa as she fingered some dark stuff which circled her throat and was tucked into her woolen blouse, drove Jim to open the envelope.

She was bidding him good-by, telling him what he had already learned from the Winnipeg paper. Then he read:

Jim; darling, I've come back! I was hurt—tried to close my heart to you. But it was no use, you already were there—had all of it! You just wouldn't be driven out. Oh, I've been so unhappy since leaving that note. They tried to drive me into a hateful thing, but my magician in the forests held me with his spell. Jim, I couldn't wait for spring

—I've come back to you, dear maker of magic. Do you want me, now, after the pain I gave you? I reached Bonne Chance by dog team, yesterday, and here I am at Sunset House writing you, so you may know on your return I wanted those big arms of yours around me again—wanted to know you still loved me. Sarah would not let me in until I told her why I had come; then the dear old soul cooked lunch for me. She loves you, too, Jim.

I beg of you to come to Bonne Chance when you get this, and tell me I haven't lost you—haven't brought my heart through the snows to you in vain. I love you, love you, Jim.

AUORE.

Jim Stuart read and reread the letter until the words grew illegible to his blurred eyes. Like the thrust of a knife had come the shock of her first letter; and now, numb with the dull agony of despair, a joy more poignant than pain held him inarticulate.

He raised his hand to his hot forehead, as his dazed eyes turned to the woman who watched him.

"She come wid sled to see you," explained Sarah. "She cry w'en I tell her you travel nord wid de dog. I not let her een de house ontill she say she ees your woman. Den she write dat lettair and tell me to say noding ontill you read it."

Jim's heart was beating with delirious joy. She had cast MacLauren aside, laughed at the lure of the city, to come to him. Her heart was too wild to be caged down there in Winnipeg; she belonged to the forests, to the land of the "long snows."

His face darkened with disappointment as he looked at his watch. It was too late—too late to gallop his tired dogs across ten miles of frozen lake. The post would be asleep. To-morrow morning he would go to the girl who had flouted the smooth MacLauren to come back to her fur trader, and he would demand of LeBlond his daughter—take her by force, if it came to that; for she loved him, loved him. She had said she was his—his woman. In the

face of LeBlond, he'd take her. They'd be married by the missionary at Fort Hope. She'd never escape him again. For he was a made man, now. Sunset House would startle headquarters at Winnipeg with its trade. Now, he had more than a heart and empty hands to give her. Aurore! Aurore!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE WOMAN THIEF.

AS the famished and half-mad Jim ate his supper, his eye was caught by the dark stuff circling the hovering Sarah's thick neck.

"What's that you've got around your neck?" he demanded.

The copper-hued features of the Ojibwa lit with pride. "Dat ees seelk *ajigan* she breeng Sarah."

"What? A stocking? On your neck?"

Sarah straightened with dignity as she countered with disdain: "You t'ink I wear eet on my foot—dat ver' nice seelk?"

His pent emotion found release in uncontrolled laughter, while Sarah stoutly held her ground with sober face.

Then he appeased her with: "You'll be good to her now she's come back to Jim?"

The Ojibwa beamed until her black eyes were slits in her broad face.

"W'en she go, she hug Sarah. She geeve her wan beeg kiss on dis place." and Sarah pointed proudly to an expanse of dusky cheek.

"That's like her—all heart and impulse. Sarah would die for her now," thought Stuart, as he rose and, taking his cap, went to the trade house.

Already Omar had started opening the fur packs brought from the North, and two men ran their fingers through the shimmering pelts, classifying their primeness and making an estimate of their value down on the railroad. They were admiring a large black fox, which

for size, thickness and sheen of its jet fur, was the prize of the trip north.

"It will bring a thousand in Winnipeg, Omar," commented Jim. "I never saw a better one."

"Ah-hah! Dat ees good wan for the——"

The hurried entrance of Esau drew the eyes of the men at the counter.

"De sky look ver' queer 'cross de lak'!" he announced. "I watch eet for long pieca."

"Where?" Jim demanded. "South, toward LeBlond's?"

"Ah-hah! De sky ees light lak bush fire mak' een de summer."

"Then it's the buildings at LeBlond's!" said Jim, starting for the door, followed by the others. "It's out of range of the northern lights, and there're none to-night, anyway! It's too thick!"

A fire at LeBlond's! What could it mean?

Outside in the snow the three men gazed through the gloom of the thick night across the frozen lake, where a dull glow hung above the horizon.

"Dat ees fire for sure," muttered Omar.

"Fire!" thought Jim. "It might be the living quarters, the trade house, too! If so, she'd have nothing but the Indian shacks for shelter!" He would go!

"Hitch our dogs, Omar; I'm going over!"

"W'y you worree eef dat place burn?" demanded the half-breed.

Jim thrust his face close to the almost invisible features of his friend. "Because," he said, "she's come back to me—my girl! She's there! She may need help. Understand?"

For answer, a calloused hand fumbled in the dark, found Jim's, and closed in a hard grip. "I get de dog!" And Omar hurried away.

Ten miles of lake trail broken only by the passage of the sled which had

carried Aurore to Sunset House lay before Jim and Omar, as they started with the empty sled through the murk of the starless night. There were stretches where the wind had brushed the ice clean of snow, or packed it with its pounding. Here the dogs, spurred by the shouts of the men on the sled, lengthened out in a long gallop. There were reaches where the snow had drifted as it had fallen, which drove the hurrying men ahead to break trail on their snowshoes, while the willing dogs floundered to their shoulders.

On went the team toward the glow in the sky across the great lake, and, as they traveled, Stuart wondered what awaited him at what was once Bonne Chance. It was early; they couldn't have been caught in their beds, he assured himself. She was there, safe, whatever had happened, this girl who had come back to him through the December snow. In an hour he'd have her in his arms—watch the color rush into her dark face and her eyes light with the joy of his coming.

They reached a strait between two of the islands through which the wind had swept as through a funnel, scouring the ice of snow. Shortly the post clearing would open up before them and they would know what had happened.

"Faster, Wolf!" Jim snapped his long goad in the biting air, as he called to the lead dog who had taken the place of the lost Smoke. Leaping into their collars, the huskies scrambled and slid over the fast going of the strait ice, while the sled yawed and skidded behind them. Shortly the racing team rounded a point of island, and there, a mile away, an inferno of red flames leaped from the ruined trade house of Louis LeBlond, while near it huddled the dark shapes of the impotent people of the post.

"The trade house!" cried Jim with relief. "His quarters are safe!"

She was there, among those dark fig-

ures, and in minutes he would look in her eyes—hear her voice.

Yelping as they ran, the excited dogs took the sled up from the lake ice into the clearing. Running to a shawled group of awed Indian women, Jim cried: "Where's LeBlond?" as his roving eyes circled the clearing for the familiar figure he sought.

A gray-faced squaw pointed to four men carrying bags of flour on tump lines from a heap of salvaged provisions to the stockade gate leading to LeBlond's house.

Following, Stuart overtook the packers as they reached the house and dropped their loads on the slab porch.

"LeBlond!" he called.

At the name, one of the packers turned, and from a face blackened with char, the reddened eyes of LeBlond glared at Jim.

"What d'yuh want here?"

"We saw the light in the sky," replied Jim, unruffled, "and I came to offer you my quarters—if you needed them. I'm glad that you don't."

"That's not why you came! You came for her. Well, yo' can't have her!" And the smudged face of LeBlond tightened with passion as his red-lidded eyes glittered.

"Where is she?"

"In the house! You can't see her!"

Then the black brows of LeBlond slowly contracted. He raised a mitted hand to his face, as if dazed—groping for something he could not recall—and looked blankly at Jim.

"You're all in, LeBlond. I'm sorry this happened—this loss to you. Let me see her—for a minute, and I'll go."

As though he had not heard, LeBlond turned and staggered into the house.

"Aurore! Aurore!" he called, as his head man, Renault, and the two company Indians went back to their work, leaving Omar and Jim at the door.

"Queer!" thought Jim, as the voice

of LeBlond shouting his daughter's name reached them. "Where could she be? She must have been at the fire and left."

"Flore! Are you here, Flore?" Jim heard LeBlond call in French; then, "*Mon Dieu!* What's this?"

Jim and Omar looked into each other's startled eyes, as the trader appeared in the door.

"Come in here! There's something wrong!"

With a bound Jim was in the house, Omar at his heels. "What can it be? What's happened?" he gasped, suddenly cold with a great fear.

"Look!" commanded LeBlond.

On the floor of the large living room, bound and gagged, lay an Indian woman, unconscious, a red welt smearing her forehead. Overturned chairs bore evidence of a struggle.

"I've searched the house!" he cried in his desperation. "She's not here; she's gone! They took her when they bound Flore, here!"

The brutal swiftness of the blow left Jim dazed, incapable of thought. "Aurore! Aurore!" he groaned. "What they done to you?" Then his brain cleared. There was no time to lose! He must think—act!

"You're sure she's not in the house?"

"She's not here! She's not here!" cried the shattered father.

"Omar, circle the house and stockade for tracks! LeBlond, tell your people! We must bring this woman to, and get her story. Get some whisky! Quick!"

Jim slashed the rawhide thongs binding the unconscious Ojibwa, removed the gag, and forcing whisky down her throat, got a weak pulse from her wrist as Omar burst into the room.

"Trail of dog team from behind stockade to lak'. He got her w'en dey fight de fire at trade house! Paradese!"

The hand of Jim Stuart holding a whisky glass to the lips of the uncon-

scious Flore shook as a poplar leaf flutters in wind.

Paradis had come for his revenge!

"Aurore! Aurore!" groaned Jim in his agony. Then he straightened where he knelt at the side of the Indian, and the face which met Omar's pitying eyes was flint hard with a savage ruthlessness.

"We'll trail him, Omar, night and day, until his dogs die on their feet! If you get him first, he's mine! Bring him to me—alive! He's mine!"

"I breeng heem. He weel die slow. I breeng heem."

As the hurt Ojibwa revived under the stimulant, the half-crazed LeBlond appeared with Renault.

"We've found his trail on the lake! He's headed for the outlet! Jules and I are starting now! No one would be mad enough for this but Paradis!"

"Yes, it's Paradis," said the tortured Jim. "I'm crossing the lake for two six-dog teams. Look here! You can't hold his tracks in a night like this, man. You're worn out. Get some rest, start at daylight, and wait for me at the Nipigon Trail. If he hasn't turned south, there, he'll take the Albany, the Pipestone, or the Deer Lodge Trail north, and we'll separate and get him."

Renault nodded. "Dat ees right t'ing to do."

"He'll have hours the start of us, LeBlond." Jim rose to his feet and rested his hand on the shoulder of the other. "But if he's ahead of me, I'll get him, if he goes to the Winisk barren grounds!"

LeBlond gripped Jim's hand as he murmured his gratitude.

Then Flore found her voice, and, kneeling beside her, the two drawn-faced men got her story. When the cries of fire, outside, drew LeBlond from his supper table, Aurore had watched from a window while she slipped into her heavy moccasins and fur coat. Suddenly there was a noise

in the kitchen, a rush of moccasined feet, and as Flore turned to recognize Paradis, a blow on the head that shut from the Ojibwa all knowledge of what followed.

"He set that fire to get me out of the house, then gagged and tied her and carried her to the sled behind the stockade," groaned the trader. "But she fought him—she fought him! Look at this room!"

"One moment, before we start." Jim gazed pitilessly into LeBlond's begrimed and tortured face. "I want to clear up something. You sent him, as you agreed, to Nipigon?"

"Yes, and he never reported there; he deserted us."

"You didn't send him to the Sturgeon?"

The blood showed in LeBlond's smudged cheeks as his haggard eyes glittered.

"You accuse me——" He choked back his anger and went on. "I gave you my word. I keep my word, Stuart! He deserted us!"

"I'm glad to hear it. I met him at Sturgeon Lake in September."

CHAPTER XXX.

TWO CLEWS.

BACK through the thick night to Sunset House hurried the tired dogs and men. As they reached the trade house, where Esau dozed, waiting for their return, it was snowing. In a half hour two six-dog teams, each loaded with food for three weeks, sleeping robes and shed tent, left the lighted trade house, where Esau, Marthe, and the moaning Sarah were gathered to say good-by, and faded into the murk. Before dawn the dog drivers saw in the distance a fire on the shore of the white thoroughfare of the Nipigon Trail. Shortly they joined LeBlond and his head man.

"He's headed for the Albany; we fol-

lowed the trail beyond here for a mile," announced LeBlond.

"He may follow the Albany as far as Fort Hope," said Jim, "but from there he'll strike north for the Sturgeon country where he's got friends. But we've got to cover the three trails north. You take the Albany. We'll hit the other two."

"He's thirty or forty miles ahead of us," groaned LeBlond, nervously pacing to and fro. "I'll wish you luck and say good-by."

There, beside the fire, in the blackness before the dawn, the two men slipped off their mittens and gripped each other's hands.

"If he's on the Albany," said Jim, "you'll hear of them from Fort Hope Indians bound for the trade."

Two great tears coursed down the hooded face of LeBlond. "We must travel night and day, Stuart, give his dogs no rest, wear him down—fast! She'll kill herself if we don't get him soon. I know her; she's like that! She won't wait long!"

With a muffled sob, LeBlond turned away and followed Renault and the dogs out to the ice.

Jim and Omar crossed the outlet to the mouth of the Deer Lodge River, but as they searched in the dim light of the dawn they found that the falling snow had obliterated all traces of a sled turning onto the river on what a few hours before had been packed snow and wind-brushed ice.

"He's circled and struck north this way or by the Pipestone Trail, Omar. He's too shrewd to take the Albany where he'd meet traveling hunters who would bring the news. But I wanted LeBlond to take the Albany. This is our job. Here's where we say, 'Bo'-jo', old friend."

"Eef we don' see hees track or hear noding een seven sleep, we meet at de Medicin Stone, on de Sturgeon. I breeng ole Jinaw wid fish for de dog."

"At the Medicine Stone, or a message there, in seven days, unless there's a big blow to hold us up." Then, losing his self-control, Jim's nervous hands gripped the heavy shoulders of his friend as his voice broke with his grief. "If they're ahead of you, Omar, bring her back—bring her back to me!"

"Omar, he find dem!" And the white-sheathed figure of the half-breed turned away. A rawhide dog whip snapped in the snow-smothered air. There was a guttural command, and Omar and his team faded into the curtain of snow from the bitter eyes of the man who watched.

Breaking trail on snowshoes for his dogs who had had little rest, Jim pushed north up the white valley of the Deer Lodge. And each hour as he traveled in the falling snow, his chances of finding traces of the passing sled of Paradis lessened. When dusk fell he turned his exhausted team into the spruce of the shore and, scraping out a fire hole, made camp. Throwing his huskies their supper of frozen fish, Jim ate and lay down in his blankets beside the fire.

But the weary man, whose tortured thoughts had whipped him over forty miles of drifted trail since dawn, did not sleep. The vision of the girl vanishing into the wide North on the sled of the mad Paradis lived in the flames of the birch logs. There, in the snow, somewhere north of him, she also lay with her despair beside a fire. Already, she may have killed herself, as LeBlond said she would. But she knew that dog teams were behind her—knew they'd take the trails into the heart of Kiwedín on the heels of the fleeing dogs of Paradis. And the nerve that brought her through the seas which buried her that summer day as she clung to her canoe would not falter now. Paradis was on the Pipestone or Deer Lodge Trail in an attempt to lose himself in the wilderness of the Sturgeon or the Winisk, or even the Ekwán and the coast. But be-

hind him were two who would hunt him until their dogs dropped in their traces—track him beyond the barrens of the Winisk to the frozen bay.

Jim Stuart was paying dearly for his triumph at the Medicine Stone—paying in the anguish of despair.

The dawn of a clear day broke blue and bitter on the ice-locked valley to reveal a hooded figure, his caribou capote belted close at the waist, swinging upstream, followed by his six dogs. Later, when the rising wind had swept and packed the young snow, hardening the trail, he would ride, driving the dogs to their limit. For an hour he had traveled in the half trot, half walk of the snowshoe swing, his steaming breath trailing behind him like smoke, in the freezing air, when, as he passed close to the alders of the shore of the fast-narrowing river, he suddenly stopped. A mitten brushed the rime from his eyebrows as he stared at a clump of frozen bushes.

"Snow!" Jim muttered, but the drumming of his heart challenged the word.

Running to the shore, he reached above his head and tore from the brittle twigs a piece of white fabric, stiffened by frost.

"Handkerchief!" he shouted triumphantly; and in a corner found the embroidered letters: "A. L. B." Her handkerchief! He was right! They were on the Deer Lodge Trail—ahead of him. She had dropped it as a sign to those she knew would follow.

"Courage, Aurore!" cried Jim, delirious with the joy of the discovery, as he thrust the handkerchief into his capote. "Courage!" We're coming—fast as dogs can travel!"

Leaping on his sled, he cracked his whip with a hoarse, "Hurry, Wolf! She's ahead of us, boy! They've got a big lead, but you'll wear 'em down—you'll show those scrubs what real dogs can do!"

Up the Deer Lodge, over the portage trail through the hills, to the Vermilion, and on through the day, slaved dogs and man until the cold strengthened with the dying mind and a freezing dusk fell on leg-stiff team and driver, driving them into the spruce. But through the day, as the hurrying sled passed the cold hills and the black spruce of the shore, hour after hour devouring the white miles, the snow yielded no further traces of the lost girl.

Starting under frosted stars dimming before the dawn, hanging to the trail until stars again glittered in the auroralit heavens above him, Jim urged his team down the white Vermilion to the first of the Pipestone Lakes. There he raced over the ice-hard going left by teams already bound for the Christmas trade.

Through the Pipestones and down the Sturgeon to Sturgeon Lake sped the dogs, pushed by the insistent appeals of a man half mad with grief and fear. Had Paradis doubled and struck south by the Fort Hope trail to the Albany? With his powerful team driven to the last ounce of their stamina, Jim wondered if he had overtaken and passed the man he hunted, concealed somewhere on the Pipestones? It was possible, for in spots the lakes were hammered by the wind and the snow too hard to carry the trail of a sled or the marks of dogs' nails. Powerless to warn him, from the timbered shore she may have seen him pass by.

And so, one pitiless gray day, when the dying sun hung smothered in haze above the black ridges which ringed the Sturgeon, six footsores, stiff-legged dogs, heads down, tails brushing the ice, crept within sight of the island of the Medicine Stone.

"It is he!" said Omar to old Jinaw, in Ojibwa, as they waited beside a fire for the appearance of Jim at the rendezvous. "He has come fast, for the trail is long; but he has seen nothing."

Trail-beaten dogs and driver limped in from the lake ice. In amazement Jinaw stared at the drawn face and tortured eyes of the factor of Sunset House, as they shook hands. To Jim's eager look Omar shook his hooded head. "No sign—nodding."

Groping under his skin capote, Jim produced the pitiful square of white muslin.

"I found this on the Deer Lodge—nothing since. I never spotted a sled track; the snow wiped out everything. What d' the Indians say?"

Omar gravely shook his head in stolid indecision.

"I talk to two hunters on de Pipestone, but dey see no trail and no sled headin' nord."

"In one-two sleep," said Jinaw in his native tongue, "there will be many teams from the Winisk and the lower Sturgeon. They bring their fur to the House of the Sunset. If he passed here they have met him."

"Can he keep alive—find game in the winter on the Winisk and the Sturgeon, Jinaw?" asked Jim.

The old Indian shook his head. "He will not know where to find the caribou up there. And the wind is bitter in the Moon of the Spirit. They will starve."

"Starve!" muttered the man who listened, with a shudder. "Better to starve, though, than live that long with Paradis!"

That night Jim lay like a dead man. There would be no start before dawn under the stars for him and his dogs. Before daylight, six inches of new snow covered the trails to the Winisk and the lower Sturgeon. Until the hunters came in from the north Omar and Jinaw insisted that their chief rest with his dogs. To go on blindly was madness.

Late in the afternoon Jim waked to the yelps of huskies. The first of the Winisk hunters were in to meet Jinaw, on their way to the trade. Throwing off his robes, Jim hurried to a knot of

hooded Indians who stood beside their panting dogs, gesticulating excitedly as they talked to Jinaw and Omar.

"You say a sled passed your camp in the night heading north?" Jim heard Omar ask in Ojibwa.

"Yes, our dogs heard them, and in the morning there was the fresh trail in the young snow."

"Would an Indian pass your camp in the night?"

"No, he would stop. It was a stranger."

Omar turned to meet the glittering eyes of his chief. "I'm starting, now! We can't take any chances; we've got to cover both trails north!" insisted Jim. "But the Winisk is mine; you take the Sturgeon and travel until you're sure he's not ahead of you; then backtrack and follow me down the Winisk with fish for the dogs, and some grub. We may need them!"

"Two are better than one," objected Omar. "My dogs have good rest; yours are——"

"He is mine, Omar!" Jim turned angrily from tightening his sled lashings. "I want to meet him alone." Then he said, with a muffled sob: "She may be starving, already—starving!"

Down the lake, purple under the starlight, Jim's six dogs galloped into the North.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"WE'VE WON!"

CLEAR, before him, over the white shell of the lake, led the sled tracks of the hunters from the Winisk. Thirty miles—thirty miles away, she had been at dawn. While he had slept she had been there, over the hills to the north—calling to him; and he had not heard. Already she may have cheated the madman who had hoped to disappear with her into the white heart of Kiwedín—might have chosen, in her desperation, the refuge of death.

Crossing the portage to the Winisk,

Jim traveled through the night, holding a grip on his sanity by running until exhausted behind the sled. Later, at the camp of the hunters, he found a single sled trail which led downstream in the young snow.

"You've got a day's start, Paradis," Jim's hoarse voice broke on the silence, "but you've lost! Every hour you're coming closer—I'm crawling up on you, until—I reach you—with my hands!"

Four hundred miles to the north, the Winisk met the frozen coast of Hudson Bay—four hundred miles of pitiless hills, of desolate forests, of muskeg and white barrens over which the withering winds of midwinter beat endlessly.

But Paradis should never see the bay!

The man who tightened his belt as his haggard eyes followed the trail before him over the river ice was obsessed by one thought.

"She'll not wait long. It's a matter of days!" he muttered, as he started. "No rest—no sleep, while I see this trail!"

Ruthless as a starved wolf on a caribou track, stopping only to eat, all that day down the winding Winisk Jim held to the sled trail in the snow. At last the gallant dogs, who for twenty hours had driven their iron thews to his call, faltered.

"*Marche, Wolf!*" wearily protested the hoarse voice of the man who, to lighten the load for his spent dogs, for hours had swung head down, at the tail of the sled. At the call the gallant lead dog lifted his lolling head, and lurched forward in the traces; but the team behind were done and, making no response, hitched along at a slow walk.

"It's no use! We're through!" groaned the man who had driven himself to the end of his strength, in his ears the voice of Aurore ever calling him on—on over the endless snow.

The swift December night was close and, as the team crawled behind him,

Jim staggered ahead, searching for a place to camp. Shortly the trail he followed swung in to the shore.

"Their camp!"

Spurred by the thought of what the snow would reveal, the excited man followed the trail into the timber.

In seconds he would know—know if she lived! There might be a message—a sign that she still hoped, hoped for the help that her eyes had strained for in vain.

There in the thick spruce ahead was the fire hole, with its dead embers—the beaten snow of the camp. With pounding heart he reached the spot trampled by the dogs and a man's moccasins.

"She's alive! She's with him!"

Before him in the snow were the imprints of small feet.

Frantically he searched the camp site for some evidence that she had not despaired—some sign to the speeding dog teams on the trail of Paradis. And at last, in a small cedar he found a scrap of birch bark.

On it was traced with a charred stick:

Dogs gone! Come quick!

A.

"She knows we're behind her—knows we're coming, Wolf!" Jim shouted to the dogs who had brought the sled in and lay panting on the snow. "His team's done for! We'll get him to-morrow, you cripples! A big feed and sleep to-night. To-morrow we'll burn up the trail!"

Later, as the muffled body of Jim Stuart lay in the sleep hole beside the flaming birch logs, and near him, noses buried in thick tails, curled his trail-beaten team, deep in the sleep of utter exhaustion, the spruces above them fretted with the rising wind. And before dawn, the first northwester from the ice fields of the bay was shrieking up the valley of the Winisk.

The man who waked, and stirred his stiffened legs to rise and freshen his

fire for his breakfast kettle, found the camp buried in drift as the slant of the blizzard flayed the rocking spruces.

For a space Jim lay in his blankets while tears of weakness and shattered hope slowly froze on his uncovered face.

"I'd have reached them to-day! They're not far ahead—ten-fifteen miles," he groaned. "But the dogs won't face this long."

Eating his breakfast, he harnessed the dogs, reluctant to leave their sleeping holes in the snow, secure from the drive of the wind which roared past, up the river.

"*Marche, Wolf!*" Jim snapped his whip beside the ears of the gaunt leader, and man and dogs plunged with lowered heads into the white smother.

On they went while the wind strengthened, sweeping the snow before it in swirls which sucked their breath, blinding their eyes, heaping drifts high on the river trail which Jim floundered through, leading his team of snow-sheathed wraiths by a thong. As he fought his way yard by yard, his numbing face and fingers warned him of the slowly increasing cold. Still he battled on; the pin-pointed scourge of snow crystals stinging his cracked cheeks like shot, caking his stubble of a beard and his eyebrows with ice. Often, breath whipped from their nostrils by a white maelstrom, man and dogs lay down, backs to the toothed fury. Then, above the beat of the wind, the voice of *Aurore* would call, and wiping the ice from the battered noses of his blinded huskies, Jim would again force them to their feet and plunge head down into the storm.

So they went through the morning, but at last, the tortured dogs refused longer to face the pitiless barrage which smeared their muzzles with frozen blood. Turning in their traces, they lay down, backs to the knife-edged drive of the wind, while the snow drifted over them.

Kneeling beside his gaunt lead dog, Jim dropped his mittens and rubbed with his stiffening fingers the crimsoned snow from the hairy nose, freeing the slant eyes.

"You've worked yourself to the bone, boy. I'll never forget!" he panted.

The inflamed eyes of the leader squinted painfully at the hooded face beside his, as his red tongue answered.

He was miles nearer his man, for in that storm the weakened dogs of Paradise would anchor him to his camp, but Jim led his team into the windbreak of the timber with a heart sore with his failure. She was doomed to another night with the torture of its doubt and fear before the galloping dogs of the man who loved her reached her.

Deep in the windbreak of the timber, Jim scooped out a fire hole in the snow with a shoe and made camp. A Hudson Bay norther often blew for three days; but in the morning he would start again—battle into the toothed wind that stung the face like a whip-lash; fight his way, while his legs lasted, to the girl who prayed, in the hands of a madman, for his coming.

In midafternoon, night fell like a blanket, as the white drive of the blizzard roared past the drifted camp in the spruce. But long before the bitter blackness preceding the dawn, the wind had whipped itself out and the snow died. With the falling of the wind, the first fierce cold of December, hard on the heels of the norther, gripped the valley of the Winisk, to split the river ice with the boom of cannon while the timber snapped like rifle shots in the vise of the frost.

As the stars dimmed in the withering down, six lean huskies, followed by trailing ribbons of frozen breath, started down the river, purple with shadow, between the bleak buttresses of the hills. Riding the sled where the wind had scoured the ice, breaking a path on his snowshoes for his flounder-

ing dogs, where drifts barred the way, Jim pushed north. The sun lifted in the southeast to rim the white ridges with fire. Then, up the silent valley drifted a long wail on the freezing air. The ears of the plodding team lifted. Their black nostrils quivered as they sought for the scent of their hereditary enemy.

"The wolves are after some breakfast!" muttered Jim, snapping his whip as the dogs trotted over a stretch of wind-scoured river. Again the far call reached the team. Lifting his nose, the shaggy leader sent back the answering challenge of the husky, as the team behind him snarled and yelped in their excitement.

A half mile below the river made a sharp turn. Reaching the bend, Jim, who was breaking trail, stopped in his tracks; then, calling to his team, hurried ahead, as three gray shapes left a dark object in the snow and slunk from the river ice into the forest.

What was that by the trail?

Jim approached the thing in the snow which the wolves had left.

"After all," he gasped, "is this the end?" Had she despaired of his coming? Was she waiting there in the snow for the man who was too late?

Cold with dread, Jim stumbled forward, followed by his dogs, and looked.

Torn by the fangs of the starving wolves lay the carcass of a husky, lean to emaciation.

With a cry of relief and joy, Jim shouted to his sniffing dogs.

"We've got him, boys! His dogs are done! He left this one yesterday, but he didn't travel far in that blow!"

Two miles farther on, a fresh sled trail leaving the timber for the river ice marked the last camp of Paradise. But Jim's anxious search found no message from the girl whose moccasins had marked the snow.

Then, with a shout to each of his dogs and a hug for the bony leader, the

race was on. Three-four hours' lead, with three dogs dying on their feet, separated Jim from the girl he had followed into the frozen heart of Kiwedín. Before the sun hung high in the south he would reach her—have her in his arms. Aurore!

Down the white valley slaved the team with its mad driver, floundering through breast-high drifts, where the snow billowed like the sea; scrambling at a wild gallop over the wind-hammered reaches, drawing closer, ever closer, to the fleeing sled of Paradis. Spurring his panting dogs with curse and caress, merciless alike to himself and his team, the half-crazed Stuart pressed on.

Then the river widened and the white plain of a lake opened before the hollow eyes of the exhausted Jim. Leaving his spent dogs on the snow Stuart climbed a snow-drifted boulder.

Painfully his squinting eyes followed the sled trail out across the glittering lake. He looked long, blinking in the glare from the snow; then leaped from the boulder and staggered to his team. His excited voice broke the stillness.

"They're out there, Wolf! We've caught 'em, boy! We've won!"

Circling the lean neck of the lead dog with his arms, Jim kissed the scarred skull of the great beast whose gallant heart had kept the flagging team on the trail.

Out over the white lake, broken by drift, reeled the drooping dogs, red tongues swinging from lowered heads, urged by their frenzied driver.

"Two miles more, Wolf; only two miles more, and we're through!" pleaded the strained voice of the man who had crucified his body to reach the goal his eyes at last visioned.

Across the lake, creeping spots on the snow beckoned him on. Minute by minute he gained on the moving team ahead. Kneeling on his sled, his rifle in his hands, Stuart's weakened eyes sought the figure of Aurore. But the

glare fused dogs and people in a black blur.

Rapidly the pursuing team closed on its quarry. Then the sled ahead stopped. The dogs were down!

Jim dropped his mittens and cocked his rifle. The beaten Paradis would fire at the coming team—would not quit without a fight. If she'd only leave the sled—run into the snow! Didn't she see him; know he was coming?

Barely a rifle shot separated the teams when a tall figure lurched from the stalled sled and stood over the broken dogs sprawled in the snow. Then an arm lifted a long dog whip.

He was trying to lash his dogs to their feet! Was he mad—out of his head? Wouldn't he fight? Why didn't he see them close on his heels?

Jim called to the huddled shape on the sled. "Aurore! Aurore! Lie down! Get out of the way!" He motioned with his free hand, but the hooded head was turned from him.

"She's right in line of fire, if he shoots!" groaned the rapidly approaching Jim. Then the prostrate lead dog rose. The whip handle of Paradis crashed on his head; but, crouching, the husky lunged the length of his traces, his jaws snapped, and he pulled his tormentor to the snow.

As Paradis fought to free himself, the girl reeled to the skeleton lead dog, anchored by his traces. Again and again she slashed at the rawhide tugs. Loose, the maddened husky was on the driver, tearing at his throat.

"Aurore!"

Turning, the girl dropped the knife she held, and, like one in a dream, made an uncertain step forward, hands outstretched, her marveling eyes on the man who ran to her. "Jeem! Jeem!" she cried, as his arms took her. "I never saw you, Jeem!"

"I've found you—found you at last!" he murmured to the sobbing girl crushed to his breast.

"Oh, I knew you'd come—come for me!"

There, in silence, while the starved lead dog worried the dead man in the snow, Jim held to his heart the girl he had followed four hundred white miles to find on the nameless lake. Her wild sobbing ceased and he gently pushed back the hood from her thin face.

"Starved!" he murmured. "Starved, and worn out!"

The ghost of her old smile returned as her great eyes shone.

"Starved? Yes, starved for you, Jeem—for the sight of your sled."

Then the fur of their hoods met, shutting out the white world around them.

"We must get back up the river, and make camp," said the intoxicated Jim, at length, shocked back to reality by the freezing air. "I'll take his dogs, poor brutes. They were certainly game! And that lead dog, when you cut his traces——"

"Oh!" she broke in. "I forgot the dogs! Get them, Jeem! I can't look at his face, there!"

Leaving her, Jim went to the lead dog, still guarding his kill in the snow. As he approached, the skeleton husky slowly rose to his feet, hair stiff on his gaunt frame, fangs bared in a snarl.

The eyes of the man opened in amazement, his jaw sagged, as the girl watched. He thrust his bare hands, palms upward, toward the threatening dog.

The lifted lips slowly sheathed the white fangs. The dog's flattened ears rose from his battered skull. The snarl died in his throat. He sniffed curiously at the man facing him.

Jim's wondering eyes blurred at the red welts raised by the dog whip on the black muzzle nearing his extended hands.

"Smoke!" he choked. "Smoke, boy, don't you know Jim?"

The bloodshot eyes of the husky

searched the face of the man. His black nostrils dilated. He took a cautious step forward, his nose seeking the hands thrust toward him—hands which stirred vague memories blurred by months of brutality and starvation. Another sniff and dim recollection of a master who never struck, whose voice was a caress, harassed his dazed brain.

"Smoke! It's Jim—Jim, boy! Don't you remember Jim, Smoke?"

With a whimper, the dog fiercely nuzzled the outstretched hand as, at last, poignant memory of the lost master flooded his brain. He sprang upon the man kneeling in the snow, his red tongue covering him with mad caresses as he yelped and whimpered his joy. Then, weak as he was, Smoke circled Jim again and again in a mad gallop, to return to the waiting arms and hear the crooning love words his ears had once known.

"You've been beaten and starved and broken, boy, but it's over now. There'll be happy days for you and Jim!" Then on the hairy skull Stuart's groping fingers found the furrow left by the bullet which had stunned Smoke at the portage, enabling Paradis to take the dog with him in his fleeing canoe.

While Smoke yelped and whimpered, leaping upon him in an ecstasy of joy, Jim glanced at the crumpled Paradis, gray face distorted in the grimace of death.

"You were lucky, Paradis," he said to the thing in the snow. "If Omar or I had taken you alive, you'd have died slow, Paradis—slow and hard!"

Taking Aurore's sleeping bag, he cut loose the remaining two dogs and returned to her.

"I didn't tell. I wanted Smoke to recognize you," she said, as Jim wrapped her snugly on his sled. "I think he knew me, and often I stole food for him. At night he always came to me when we made camp."

"Don't talk about it!" Jim pro-

tested, haunted by the thought of her days in the power of the man who had paid.

As he knelt busy with the sled lashings, tired but happy, she suddenly touched his shoulder.

"Jeem!"

He looked up.

"Why did you follow us? For hatred of him—or love of me?"

She had her answer in his eyes as he bent and kissed her.

Triumphantly she smiled through her tears.

"You do love me—even after this?"

With a murmured protest, he kissed her tenderly. But she was not through. She reached and turned Jim's face toward her.

"Look at me! That dead man there has much to answer for—but not that! He was mad; but he worshiped me—respected me! I didn't trust him, and always carried my knife. He knew I was ready to kill myself!"

"You think my love is so small a thing?"

"No!" she sobbed. "You've proved it, lover of mine! But I would not have lived—you would have found him alone!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

A BRIDAL SALUTE.

SNUG in the spruce beside a great fire, they camped that night and feasted, in their happiness oblivious of the fierce cold which drew down the stars until they glittered close to the spruce tops while the aurora pulsed across them in flashes of green and rose and pearl. Then back up the Winisk they journeyed, Smoke and his gaunt teammates loose while Jim's feeding thickened their blood.

Meeting Omar with a sled load of food, Jim and Aurore passed the Sturgeon and reached the Pipestones. From there, Omar hurried south to carry the news of Aurore's safety to LeBlond and

aid Esau with the Christmas trade, while Jim turned east on the Fort Hope trail.

"We're going to see a friend of mine, Father Jean of the Oblate Mission, Omar," Jim explained with a grin. "Tell them we'll be home for New Year's."

On the last day of the Little Moon of the Spirit, which is December 31st, a seven-dog team, with two huskies running loose in the rear, its harness brave with bells and colored worsted, jingled gayly up the ice-hard lake trail toward Sunset House. As the excited dogs took the sled toward the post at a gallop, the driver, kneeling behind the hooded Aurore, pointed into the west.

"What a welcome!" he laughed. "Even the skies are outdoing themselves for our home-coming."

She turned and circled his neck with an arm.

"It's too beautiful to be real, Jeem."

In the rich color of her dark face there was little trace of the agony of the days which had passed.

"Do you think you can endure it here for a while with me, Aurore of the sunset cheeks?" he teased.

"With skies like this and Jeem Stuart to love me, I could live at Mitawangagama forever."

For reply he tilted back her chin, buried in its fur hood, and kissed her. His heart was filled with happiness.

As Smoke led the galloping team up the lake shore to the post, the guns of a group of Indians, led by Omar and Esau, and Jinaw, the Rattlesnake, saluted again and again. Up through the tepees of the hunters which dotted the clearing Jim drove his dogs to the stockade gate. Swinging the laughing girl to her feet, they hurried to the house, where Sarah waited in the doorway.

"*Nia! N'go!* Meester Jeem, I glad to see you!" The wide face of the excited Sarah knotted impotently in her endeavor to hide her tears.

"Sarah," he laughed, patting her broad shoulders, "I've brought back Mrs. Jim to live with us."

With a laugh, Aurore hugged the embarrassed Ojibwa.

"Sarah and I will always agree. We both love Jim Stuart."

They were in the lighted living room, when Jim choked, coughed, then burst into laughter.

"Sarah! What in the—— Look! Look at Sarah's *gibodiegwason*! What do you know about that?"

With the pride and assurance of the wearer of a Paris gown, Sarah stood in the baggy knickers on which she had lavished so many painful hours, await-

ing the approval of the convulsed Aurore and Jim.

"Sarah, they're beautiful!" cried Aurore, while the Ojibwa grinned in delight.

Then, as Jim gravely surveyed the bags, which, like Turkish trousers, hung to her outcurving and ponderous ankles, he turned soberly to Aurore, as Sarah rolled triumphantly back to the kitchen.

"Do you realize what this means? You have lured an Indian woman to break the habit of a lifetime, you sorceress. Is it strange that your *gibodiegwason* enchanted a poor white trader?"

With a bound she reached him and smothered his laughter with her lips.



MR. MURDOCK'S BIG WIND

WHEN the city of Miami had as its guests last winter a hundred newspaper men from all parts of the country, the genial hosts were disappointed, aggrieved, and dejected because, on the first day of the week which they planned to devote to showing the guests "the land of everlasting summer" in January, a cold wave struck southern Florida. That is, it seemed like a cold wave to the Floridians. To the visitors it was hardly more than an April breeze.

The newspaper men, however, wanted to say something to assure the Miamians of their enjoyment not only of the hospitality but also of the climate provided for them. Accordingly, Victor Murdock, the red-headed and eloquent Kansas publisher, was appointed to act as the reassuring mouthpiece of the party at a luncheon that day.

"Folks," said Murdock, after being introduced as one of the champion long-distance lecturers of all time; "folks, we understand that some of you Miamians are disappointed that your typical weather is not on tap to-day. Don't give it another thought, we beg you. In the first place, I've traveled all over the country, and I never yet knew the weather to perform for any set of visitors. In the second place, this ain't cold weather, anyway.

"Folks, you don't know what cold is! You don't know even what real weather is. We have the real thing out in my part of the country. In my own Kansas I've seen the wind so strong that it picked up an Indian from the prairie, blew him ten miles, flattened him against a barn door, and held him there until he starved to death!"

By Ernest
Douglas



Borrowed Luck

Author of "The Wooden-legged Spook," Etc.

In which Joe Bonner and his magical wooden leg, together with his compadre, Peter Wayland, get all mixed up in a Yaqui insurrection.

A COMPLETE STORY

TO have a half-clad, ferocious-looking savage slip unannounced over one's window sill, out of the dark and stilly night, is not exactly an ordinary occurrence even in Hermosillo, state of Sonora, Mexico, where anything can and does happen. If one has heard stories of hostile Yaquis stealing right into the city and murdering peaceable citizens in their beds, it will not be surprising if assorted cold chills use his spinal column for a race track. I know that my own backbone turned to frozen jelly that evening at the Hotel Moderno, when we first made the acquaintance of Cayetano.

Joe Bonner, who sat on the other side of our little reading table, tinkering with the straps and screws of his wooden leg, took it more calmly than I

did. Joe is excitable by nature but mighty hard to rattle when it comes down to a real pinch, as I had observed more than once.

He looked toward the other end of the room at the dresser where our revolvers were stowed, at the closet which held our rifles, and saw that the visitor would have plenty of time to plug either of us that attempted to reach the firearms. A bristling cartridge belt and the shiny black butt of a pistol were distressingly visible under the Indian's torn, discolored old jacket.

It was quickly apparent, however, that our extermination was not his immediate object. He advanced a step or two with hands outstretched, palms upward, and grunted:

"Amigo! Muy amigo!"

"Welcome, chief," responded Joe, pushing out a chair with his genuine left foot and swiftly attaching his artificial right leg, just in case rapid locomotion might become desirable. "Take a seat. Have a cigarette."

Our guest occupied the chair gingerly, as though unaccustomed to such a luxury. Upon the floor he dropped his frayed palm-leaf hat. He lighted the proffered *cigarrito* and puffed for several seconds before speaking again.

"A thousand thanks, señor. I am not the chief, I am Cayetano. But I have come from Chief Gavino to make peace talk."

Then our eyes did bulge. Chief Gavino—*El Tigre de los Montañas*—The Tiger of the Mountains! This dusty, weary traveler was an emissary from almost the last of the Yaqui leaders to carry on with the rebellion against Mexican authority that had begun over a year before. The insurrecto bands had been submitting one by one; but Gavino and a company of die-hards, variously estimated at from a hundred to a thousand, stood out stubbornly and scorned all overtures. A small but expensive army was being maintained in Sonora just to subdue that handful of raiding, marauding, elusive guerrillas, but to date it had met with no luck at all and the corps commander had been called to Mexico City to explain his failure.

"We think the chief is sensible to yield," said Joe. "But why have you come to us? Military headquarters are at the barracks up near the railway station."

"No! No! We cannot trust the soldiers for they are more treacherous than rattlesnakes."

"Just what they say about the Yaquis. Well, go on."

"You *Yanquis* are friends of our people. Have you and your *compadre* not fed scores of unfortunate prisoners on their way through Hermosillo to

Heaven knows what fate? Do you not give our captive warriors tobacco, their women tortillas, and their children *panoche* and oranges? Have you not summoned doctors for the sick, even though you were threatened with death by the brutal guards? Yes, we have heard of your generosity from several who escaped and came back to us."

"They exaggerate," deprecated my partner; nevertheless, his ruddy face flushed with pleasure at the praise Cayetano was heaping upon us in barbarous Spanish. "We were sorry for the miserable prisoners and did what we could for several parties that we chanced to see. But it was really very little."

"You have shown kindness and sympathy for us when we are accustomed to nothing but abuse and oppression. So *El Tigre* has sent me to beg you to come to his camp as soon as possible."

"Eh? What's the object of that?"

"The chief is hard pressed and also sick, having been wounded several times. Fortune has deserted him, although he says long prayers and keeps many powerful charms near him. His warriors are almost out of food. The Mexicans are too numerous and too well armed for us to overcome them."

"But we dare not surrender, for Gavino and his men are so greatly hated and feared that we believe we would be stood against an adobe wall and shot—or banished to Yucatan, which is worse. We can neither resist nor give up. So in our extremity we are appealing to you, the only friends we have among the whites."

"You are very wise, señores, and we hear that several of the Mexican chiefs are your friends. Gavino thinks it possible that you may be able to make terms with them for us, so we can be assured that if we lay down our arms we will not be slain but allowed to return to our homes with our squaws and our papooses. It is our only hope. Will you come and talk with him?"

Tears stood in Joe's big blue eyes at the conclusion of this plea.

"You bet we'll come!" he choked. "Won't we, Pete Wayland?"

"Maybe," I admitted. "But there's a question or two I'd like to ask first. I can understand, Cayetano, how you dodged the cavalry that is supposed to be patrolling the Indian country. But how did you get past the police and right into the heart of the city?"

"Only one policeman stopped me, and I speak Spanish so well that I convinced him I was a common peon."

"And how did you know where to find us?"

"Before the war I was often in Hermosillo and I knew that all Americans stay at the Moderno; so I watched my chance and glided unseen into the patio. Then I stole along, peering through windows, until I came to a room where there were two men, one with red hair and a wooden leg."

That all sounded plausible enough; but I had something else on my chest.

"Don't you think it rather risky to place yourself in our power like this? We have but to report your presence and you will die at sunrise or sooner. Then, if your story is true, the army can easily complete its work of starving out your band."

"We are trusting you, señores, for we believe that your sympathies are with us and not with our enemies. The time has come when we must trust some one. Gavino said to tell you everything so that your hearts would be touched and you would come at once."

"That's enough, you sniffy old skeptic," Joe interrupted. "Any imbecile ought to be able to see that he's telling the truth. You should be proud and happy instead of so blamed suspicious."

"Your confidence is not misplaced, Cayetano. We shall indeed aid your chief to make peace on the very best terms possible."

"You speak of luck charms that have

failed him. He has now enlisted on his side the greatest of all talismans—my lucky wooden leg."

"Why bring that up?" I groaned.

"To-morrow we shall go out to the Yaqui camp. How far is it?"

"Fifty leagues or more. It is far up in the Sierra de Batuc."

"Whew! And you came all that distance afoot?"

"No; I left my horse at a rancho a few miles out, when it became exhausted. The people there know me but they think I am a *manzo*, a Yaqui of peace."

"Well, Señor Wayland and I will get horses to-morrow and go back with you."

"Say, hadn't we better take this fellow to the governor before we go charging off into the wilds?" I suggested in English. "Let's see what he thinks about it."

"Might be a good idea," Joe conceded. "We'll have to have the governor's help to accomplish anything, because he's the only official we know that has any real influence."

"This is sure a fortunate break for him, too, come to think of it. You know, he's in one grand row with the military. It's because of his criticisms that the general has been called into Mexico City to tell the *presidente* why he doesn't squelch the insurrection and have done with it. Now if the governor and his gringo chums can persuade Gavino to quit and be good, his stock will be out of sight and he'll give us the state *palacio* if we ask for it."

"A beautiful program," I commented. "Too perfect to work. I'm with you to the extent of laying the whole proposition before his excellency in the morning."

Then arose the question of what to do with Cayetano the rest of the night. Joe wanted to put him up at the hotel but he declared that a poor *indio* could not rest amid such magnificence. He

knew of a *fonda* where the chili con carne was exactly to his liking, and he would find a doorway to sleep in. There was no danger of his being recognized as a warrior.

Joe insisted, though, on giving him a khaki coat to conceal his revolver, and a whole pair of overalls to replace his tattered trousers. As a parting present he handed Gavino's messenger a twenty-peso note.

Murmuring effusive thanks and promises to return early on the morrow, our strange visitor shuffled out on his worn rawhide *huaraches*.

But he did not return in the morning. Joe fretted and fumed and went into a rage when I suggested that he had been taken in by a slippery native with a good imagination and an ambition to spend twenty pesos. So sure was he that Cayetano would yet show up that he went over to Tomas Romero's corral, where he engaged saddle horses for a long trip.

Some time after the midday siesta the *criada* brought word that a noisy and ill-tempered ruffian insisted on seeing us. We went out into the patio, to find Cayetano sprawling on a bench. Tightly holding his hand was a simpering little *chola* girl, flashily dressed and rather pretty, whom he introduced with alcoholic pride and grandiloquence as Felicia.

"She is going back to the Sierra de Batuc with us. There we will be married by the chief."

"Not much!" Joe vetoed firmly. "I thought you were a patriot and a fighting man, but here you stampede off the main track for the first *chola* that crosses your trail. Let her turn your head and fill your skin full of tequila at a time when the fate of your tribe depends on you. Out you go, girl. Scat!"

Felicia stared defiantly. Cayetano protested angrily. Joe was adamant.

"Marry her after the war, if you like,

but right now we've got other business on hand."

The pair whispered together for a moment.

"But, señor, she has no money."

Joe flung a bank note to Felicia. She glanced at it, gurgled something else into Cayetano's ear, kissed him fondly, and trotted off.

We took the Yaqui into our room, where Joe forced him to drink a quart of lime juice spiked with bromides. At first Cayetano blubbered and almost wept for his sweetheart, wailing that the fairest flower of Mexico was lost to him forever. As he became more sober the drift of Joe's lecture began to sink in, and he actually did weep with contrition. Loud and fervent were his vows to be good.

So we loaded him into a hack, drove him over to the palace, and sent up our cards to the governor.

The plump little executive was surprised and not exactly pleased when we ushered that shabby barbarian into his sumptuous private office. But he was keenly interested as soon as Joe told him who Cayetano was and the errand on which he had come. Gradually a smile of delight overspread his face.

"Bravo! Bravo!" he acclaimed at the conclusion of the recital. He was so tickled that he jumped up to embrace us and shake Cayetano's grimy hand.

"Then you think his story is true?" asked Joe, with a triumphant glance at me.

"I see no reason to doubt it. We have known for some time that *El Tigre* must be ready to capitulate. Now he is really going to surrender; not to those cowardly, blustering soldiers but to the state authorities—to me. Splendid! If you can assist in terminating this bloody uprising, there is nothing in Sonora that may not be yours."

"All right, we'll go out there and do our best. But if we can't do anything more than pave the way for a peace con-

ference—what then? As the troops are not in on this, Gavino probably won't dare get within their reach, for he knows only too well what his capture would mean. If we send for you, will you come?"

"No hazard is too great for me to incur for Mexico. I am in your hands and shall await your summons.

"Tell the Yaquis that general amnesty shall be theirs. Good luck. The best of fortune."

"Oh, that's going along with us. You don't think I'd leave my lucky leg behind, do you?"

We took no chances with Cayetano that night but stowed him in a room at the Moderno that had a heavily barred window, and hired the porter to bunk down outside his door. His jag was not even a hangover when we awakened him at dawn for breakfast.

Before sunrise we were on our way. The only pause we made that forenoon was to pick up Cayetano's horse. For two days we made good time through rough, dry, desert region that was typical of the lowlands of northern Sonora.

Once we were stopped by a detachment of cavalry and compelled to produce our permit to prospect for minerals before being waved on with ominous warnings to beware of the rebels. Cayetano, as our servant, passed without question.

On the third morning out we skirted a foothill hamlet known as San Juan de Batuc. Cayetano said that we were less than ten leagues from our destination.

For the better part of that day we climbed painfully toward the pointed blue peaks of the Sierra de Batuc. The trails were mere goat paths, but the coolness was a welcome relief, and so were the clear, splashing brooks in the canyons.

Toward midafternoon Cayetano led us into a narrow gorge where green parrots squawked, blue jays scolded, and *mosaicas* trilled amid palms and alders

that had grown to incredible heights in reaching for the sunlight above. My mind was anything but at ease. I kept thinking what a lovely place that would be for an ambushade, and what fools we had been to rush off with a strange Yaqui who had produced no proof at all that he was anything more than a clever liar. Somehow I couldn't entirely trust the fellow, although Joe had fully condoned his fall before the bright lights of Hermosillo and the bright smiles of Felicia.

Cayetano began to gobble like a turkey, so realistically that Joe jerked his rifle from its scabbard before he realized that some sort of a signal was being sounded. Some minutes later a couple of heavily armed, ragged Indians appeared just ahead.

Thanks to two previous experiences with divisions of the tribe, we could understand most of the words when Cayetano addressed them in their unmelodious native tongue. He patted himself on the back liberally for the manner in which he had fulfilled the chief's mission, and described wholly imaginary difficulties encountered in persuading the gringos to leave the capital.

The sentries preceded us up the canyon to where it widened out into a valley overgrown with oak browse and jack pines. We became rather uncomfortably conscious of scores of eyes peering at us from cover, each pair accompanied by a rifle muzzle. Here and there were rude shelters that from the rim of the basin must have looked like mere accumulations of dead brush; indeed, they were little more.

In front of one of these we halted. There was a guard on either side of the entrance; wired above it was a horse-shoe wrapped with bright string. On a cleared space to the right were polished pebbles ranged in odd geometrical patterns. Under a tree was a sort of shrine—a flat boulder striped with red and yellow ochre and decorated with

hideously ugly pottery figurines on grass mats. The limbs were strung with paper flowers, eagle feathers, and bear claws. In view were various other objects having a voodoo aspect.

"This situation," chuckled Joe, "is just made for me and my lucky leg."

One of the guards said that Chief Gavino was inside but at the moment conferring with a medicine man who claimed that he could weave a spell which would paralyze the *federales*. He knew of our arrival, though, and would see us shortly.

"I thought your people were Christians," I said to Cayetano as we waited in the shade by the shrine. "This does not look like a church."

"There is virtue in all religions," he replied. "Since *El Tigre*, our bravest fighting man, was overwhelmed in battle he has sought vainly for some really strong magic. There is no magic to help the poor Yaquis."

"Oh, yes, there is," laughed Joe. "Did I not tell you that my wooden leg is a leg of fortune?"

Two Indians came out of the chief's wikiup and one immediately slunk away as though rebuffed. The other stood regarding us appraisingly, a faintly hopeful expression relieving the sadness of his wasted face.

Cayetano would have launched into a paean of praise for himself, but Gavino gruffly bade him move our belongings into a near-by lodge and care for our horses. Then the chief limped forward to welcome us in labored Castilian.

An emaciated, melancholy specimen was *El Tigre*, a haunted and beaten man deserted alike by the god of war and the demons of sorcery. Shorter and much leaner than the average of his race, he leaned wearily on a stick, for his left foot was gone and the trousers leg had been gathered in a knot below the ankle. The right arm was shriveled and stiff. A livid scar shone through the coarse black hair above his fore-

head. About the scrawny neck was a buckskin thong laden with coins and leaden slugs.

We would much rather have remained in the open air, but Gavino insisted that we enter his *casa*. The interior was cluttered with more figurines and bones and miscellaneous amulets. I sat on a deerskin and tried to make a mental catalogue of all that occult paraphernalia, while Gavino thanked us for the favors we had shown the people and Joe grandly assured him that we were indeed true friends of the Yaqui.

"You have another friend, and a much more powerful one," Joe went on. "It is the governor of Sonora. Had he been governor last year there would have been no rebellion, for he is a just man and would have given you what you asked. Now he is anxious to intercede for you at Mexico City and save you from the soldiers."

That seemed to take about twenty years off Gavino's age. Joe was telling him what he was pathetically eager to believe, and so there were no barriers of skepticism to be broken down. The chief declared that he must immediately call his headmen together that they might hear the joyous news.

Joe made a flowery speech to ten or a dozen starved-looking warriors assembled under a hackberry tree. He lauded the governor and proclaimed that a new day was dawning for their persecuted nation. They heard him stolidly but it was obvious that he aroused a flicker of hope in their breasts. The matter would be considered in council, he was told.

Night fell with tropical suddenness while the powwow was still in progress. The Yaquis melted into the gloom. Although we knew that we were surrounded by savages who were reputed to be pitiless murderers, silence reigned unbroken save for the coo of bullbats and the hoot of a distant owl.

Gavino himself conducted us to the

shack set aside for our use. He apologized for his inability to offer more lavish hospitality but stated that the camp's food supply was reduced to burro meat, a delicacy but little appreciated by whites. Would we be so kind as to kindle no fire that might arouse the curiosity of some wandering Mexican?

So we gave the chief a can of salmon and bade him good night. We ate a cold meal from our pack and stretched out on our blankets. Joe, elated over the apparently certain success of our expedition, was soon snoring comfortably. Not so sure of our safety, I lay awake a long time; but nothing happened and I finally dropped off.

The next morning Gavino got down to cases. If we represented the authorities, and wished his people to cease hostilities, what was to be done about certain lands that had been held by the Yaquis prior to the revolt and were now occupied by squatters? Would the confiscated stock of the Indians be replaced? Without farms and animals, he pointed out, the Yaquis would be no better off than they were as hunted animals of the hills.

We could only reply that such matters must be put up to the governor and possibly referred by him to Mexico City. But his excellency had promised to come out for a parley; we would go back to Hermosillo and get him.

For the first time Gavino refused to meet our eyes directly. He gazed abstractedly into the turquoise sky and raised the objection that such a journey would cause delay; a messenger could carry a letter to the city in half the time that we would require.

Now this was not true, and *El Tigre* knew that we knew it was not true. A Yaqui courier could make little greater speed alone than with us. Ostensibly honored guests, we were actually hostages. If the governor got cold feet, sat tight in his palace and refused to nego-

tiate, pressure could be applied through us. We were his close friends, or claimed to be; besides, the capture and threatened execution of two American citizens would further strain the relations of Mexico and her big neighbor on the north, just then not any too cordial.

Possibly Gavino was not sharp enough to figure things out in detail that way, but I think he was. He may have been merely cautious about turning us loose to divulge the location of his retreat if we chose. But we were in his power and had to pretend to agree with him. Joe said that he would write the letter immediately.

We withdrew into our hut and wrestled for half an hour to compose a note that would tell more between the lines than on the surface, for we well knew that it would never pass out uncensored. Then we ingenuously laid it before Gavino. He called Cayetano, who had been to a mission school, and ordered him to read it.

"Why do you propose a meeting at San Juan de Batuc?" he said, frowning. "Does the governor not trust me enough to come here under a flag of truce?"

"Is it wise to bring him here before the treaty is signed?" Joe returned blandly. "He always travels with a small escort, and you can never be sure that one of his men will not later lead the soldiers to this place."

Gavino thoughtfully granted that this was so.

"Cayetano shall start at once with your message," he said. "He is a lazy dog and a drunkard, but he speaks Spanish better than any of us and he is very clever at hoodwinking the fed-erals."

While Cayetano was saddling a fresh horse, Joe warned him privately to steer clear of tequila and the equally perilous Felicia. The Yaqui piously hoped to be struck dead if he swerved one inch from the straight line of duty.

We spent several inactive and anxious days there with the refugees, wondering whether we were to go down in Sonoran history as peacemakers, as martyrs, or as foolhardy asses. To get my mind off the appalling possibilities that the circumstances held for us, I started an intensive study of the Yaqui language.

Joe, however, had no studious notions in his giddy red head. He would rather talk about his wooden leg than struggle with heathenish inflections and verbs. And he did talk about the leg, morning, noon and night. Wholly unhampered by facts, he stuffed those credulous natives full of ridiculous fables about the dangers from which it had rescued him, the enemies that it had confounded, and the phenomenal luck that it had brought him. Knowing that he himself half believed the peg to be imbued with mystic properties, I let him rave.

"If I but had a charm of such potency, I would conquer Mexico," Gavino remarked enviously at the close of Joe's fanciful account of the battle of Chuparosa, where he claimed first to have discovered the limb's peculiar power.

Cayetano was forty-eight hours overdue. Gavino was fretful and fearful, afraid that his courier had fallen into the hands of troopers. We were also fretful and fearful, afraid that his courier had fallen into the hands of Felicia.

Then, on a Wednesday night, Cayetano turned up with the governor's answer. We were commended for our "noble and unselfish efforts in behalf of peace," and directed to convey the writer's highest regards to *El Tigre de los Montañas*. The governor and a few of his personal retainers would be at San Juan de Batuc not later than Friday evening.

That made both of us feel a lot more cheerful. But Gavino, to our disappointment, did not share our elation.

"It is a trick," he charged, drawing on a willow-bark cigarette and turning feverish eyes upon us. "A trick to betray me."

Nonplused for a moment, Joe decided on virtuous indignation as his best course. He demanded to know what reason the chief had to suspect us of treachery.

Gavino denied that we were under suspicion—he had not forgotten our kindness to the prisoners; but the omens were unfavorable.

All that we could get out of him was that he had received some sort of a spirit warning not to go to San Juan. We made no impression upon him that night, and all the next forenoon he was shut up with the itinerant medicine man we had seen the day of our arrival.

In the afternoon Joe's barrage of persuasive blarney had some effect. Or perhaps Gavino had heard further whisperings from the ether. He grudgingly consented to accompany us to San Juan on Friday if an advance scout found no cavalrymen in that vicinity.

We heard Cayetano volunteer for this service, boasting that he had proved himself the only one crafty enough to elude the troops or to beguile them into freeing him if he was caught.

So Cayetano rode down into the foothills Thursday afternoon. We left camp Friday morning, with Gavino and a subchief named Jorge.

Although we overlooked the date at the time, it was Friday the thirteenth.

At an appointed spot in a secluded mountain valley we met Cayetano, who affirmed that the coast was clear. He had even ridden into San Juan, danced at a *baile*, and conversed with several villagers, who had no idea that they were soon to entertain distinguished visitors.

Still Gavino was not satisfied. He querulously questioned Cayetano's report, accused him of sleeping while he was supposed to be reconnoitering.

El Tigre may have been a valiant chieftain once, but adversity had reduced him to a superstitious fanatic whose whims and visions tried our patience to the breaking point. Until sunset he refused to budge from that sweltering hiding place in a clump of wild cane, but sat alone, mumbling over the metal amulets that he carried about his neck.

Joe was sore and disgusted, almost ready to throw up the whole venture. It did not surprise me to observe Cayetano eying his commander with a cynical curl of the lip.

Night descended, blanketing the world in a murky mantle that was pierced only faintly by star glow; the moon would not rise for another four hours. Joe and I and the three Yaquis emerged stealthily from the canyon and moved across a fairly level mesa, between ghostly patches of prickly pear and organ-pipe cacti. One winking light on the horizon marked the location of San Juan de Batuc.

Gavino broke a long silence by ordering Cayetano and Jorge to go ahead and ascertain if the governor had reached the place of meeting.

"Very well," assented Cayetano. "Guard well the chief, gringo friends."

"One of you is enough," Gavino suddenly decided. "Stay here, Jorge. Hurry back, Tano."

There was another halt of two hours or more under an arroyo bank before the hoofs of Cayetano's pony rang out on the flinty ground. He showered us with packages of cigarettes and gave *El Tigre* a fancy hunting knife. This, he said, was a gift from the governor, who had just arrived and was impatiently awaiting us.

We ambled on across the mesa toward that lone light. Probably we were not more than a mile from the settlement when Gavino balked. He would not go another step.

"It is not safe," he asserted. "The

omens all tell me that there is nothing but disaster at San Juan."

I thought Joe was going to poke the old fool in the jaw and carry him into town bodily. Instead he managed to control himself and to argue as with a child that there was no risk whatever, since one of the chief's own followers had made a careful reconnaissance and guaranteed that all enemies were far away.

"Your charms led you astray before and they are doing the same thing now. But I have an infallible fetish—my wooden leg—and it tells me that you shall roast in eternal torment if you do not seize this opportunity to save your people from extinction."

"If I had such marvelous magic to protect me, I would not be afraid," whimpered Gavino.

"O-o-oh! Your meaning begins to percolate. You want to borrow my leg."

And Joe Bonner, to my astonishment, rolled up his pants and removed that precious peg, which he prized more than anything on earth or in heaven.

"Here. You can't wear this, but tie it to your waist anyhow. Now you're protected more completely than if you wore a suit of armor plate nine feet thick."

Gavino hoarsely muttered his thanks and trailed our little procession along a dusty roadway that was bordered by low, dense hedges of prickly pear.

The moon's golden disk edged above the jagged sierra and cast its first bright streamers of molten silver across the plain. Now I could see that we were just entering the village.

A coyote's yelp shrilled through the stillness.

Cayetano, leading the way and just a little in front of me, clapped spurs to his pony's flanks and left us like a whirlwind.

Rat-a-tat! Rat-a-tat! Br-r-r-rrr!

Too many times in France had I

heard that clattering, sputtering racket not to know what it meant. The lane was being raked with machine-gun fire from the shadow of a wall off to our left.

Before I could bolt after Cayetano, my flea-bitten gray mare went down. I crept behind her carcass, sprawled full length, and lay there praying incoherently.

The firing ceased abruptly. Some one bellowed the Spanish equivalent of "Let 'em have it."

"The gun is jammed, my colonel."

"A thousand devils! That accursed wreck always quits at the wrong moment. But I think we have killed them all. Ready with your rifles and machetes, men. Advance. Twenty pesos to the one who finds the corpse of *El Tigre*."

I scrambled out of concealment with hands held high, but dropped them instantly and sprang to the side of Joe. My buddy lay very still in the middle of the road, his ghastly white face upturned to the sky. The right side of his head was soaked with crimson.

A ring of Mexican soldiers collected around us, staring curiously.

"Is there a doctor with this crew of assassins?" I demanded.

"The *medico* will be here in a minute," a sergeant replied.

"Scatter out," roared the colonel. "We seek Yaquis, not *Yanquis*. Where is *El Tigre*?"

"Here is one dead Indian, Colonel Sandoval. But it is not the chief."

"Nor is it my spy. He must have got out of the way in time."

From the confused shouting that I heard as they scuttled around and I worked over Joe, striving to stanch his wound, I gathered that Gavino had got clean away.

A nattily uniformed medical officer came and had Joe carried into a peon shanty. There the unconscious man was deposited on a cot. I shoosed every-

body out and propped the door shut while the doctor examined the wound.

"It is only a gash in the scalp," was the verdict. "Possibly the skull is chipped, but there is no serious fracture."

That was better news than I had hoped for. My breathing became less agitated. While we were swathing Joe's head with medicated bandages, some one pounded vigorously on the door.

I admitted the governor of Sonora, who was very pale and flustered as well as furiously angry.

"What does it all mean?" he cried, after hearing that Joe's injury was not fatal. "I was told that there were no soldiers near San Juan; yet while I was peacefully resting and waiting for *El Tigre* I was startled by the thunder of battle. How did the military learn of our appointment? How did they dare interfere with my so-beautiful plans?"

"And how did they dare waylay and shoot down an American citizen who had broken no law?" I countered bitterly. "Better ask Colonel Sandoval. I don't know any more than you do, but I heard some mention of a spy. If you see anything of that Cayetano person, let me know so I can go and blow the traitor's brains out."

The governor tore off in search of Sandoval. They met not far away, and I heard echoes of a violent quarrel, when the governor came back he was quivering and well-nigh speechless.

"Oh, those *locos* of the army!" he raged. "They have ruined everything."

"It is as you suspected, Señor Wayland. *El Tigre's* messenger turned traitor. He went to military headquarters and for the promise of a reward gave my letter to Sandoval, who is in command in the absence of the general. How did an ignorant *simplón* ever think of doing that?"

"He didn't; a little *chola* named Felicia thought of it. Well, go on."

"Must I say more? You know that

the *soldados* love me not at all, for I have too much aired my opinions of their incompetence and their cowardice. They did not want me to have the credit of bringing the rebellion to an end; so they plotted with Cayetano to waylay your party as you approached this pueblo. For you and Señor Bonner they cared not at all; what they sought was the glory of slaying *El Tigre* and bearing his head on a pole down the *calle principal* of Hermosillo. But he gave them the slip."

"Well, what next?"

"What? That is the question, indeed. Only you can save the day, Señor Wayland. You know *El Tigre* and the location of his stronghold. You must return there, express my deepest regrets for the treachery of these *ladrones*, and arrange another conference."

"Oh, *must* I? Think again. If I went near the Yaquis now I'd stop a ton of lead before I could start to begin to commence to explain that I had nothing to do with luring Gavino into that ambush. No, I'll have to decline your kind invitation to commit suicide."

The governor heaved a mournful sigh.

"Then I must resign myself to the wreckage of all my golden dreams. So be it. To-morrow we will return to Hermosillo. Will Señor Bonner be able to travel so soon?"

"He won't, and he wouldn't travel if he was able. Not if I know 'Don José of the Lucky Leg.' For *El Tigre* borrowed his peg and carried it away to-night. Joe'll go into a spasm when he finds out that it's gone. Just now he's sleeping only because the doctor gave him an opiate, and there'll be something popping when he wakes up.

"No, I guess you won't get Joe out of this district very soon. Not until he's had a look around and a stab at recovering his leg."

Sandoval, a gaunt and grim campaigner who was just then in a most

evil temper, strode in without ceremony. The governor withdrew, snarling his hate.

I started to climb the colonel's frame for making war on unoffending Americans, but he glared me down.

"Still that insolent tongue, gringo. You two were in the company of rebels, so you are also rebels. And I hear that one of you has been making threats against my spy. Disarm them, Sergeant Cota."

The sergeant entered and took my revolver, also Joe's Colt and belt that I had dropped by the cot.

Sandoval looked inquiringly at Joe.

"What? Did we shoot off the red-head's leg?"

"Not much!" I sniffed. "He lost that leg in France."

"Ah! So he has also been a bandit in France?"

"He never was a bandit anywhere!" I snapped, mad enough to fight the whole Mexican army. "He fought in a real war over there, operating a machine gun for Uncle Sam. And he was a whale of a sight better gunner than those blacksmiths of yours that tried to slaughter us just now."

"So?" Sandoval was oddly interested. "And you? Are you also a machine gunner?"

"I was. What of it?"

"Come with me."

He shoved me roughly ahead of him and into another shack a few doors down the line. There a squad of sweating and swearing soldiers, working by candlelight, were helplessly fumbling with the parts of an ancient Maxim gun that were strewn over a canvas.

"Fix it," Sandoval commanded.

Well, I fixed it. I assembled the parts and gave them a thorough oiling, which was all that they needed. It gave me little joy, though, to hear the relic chatter and spit when Cota took it outside for a test.

I was allowed to return to Joe, who

was still sound asleep. Somewhere I rustled a blanket, but there was little slumber for me. I was dreading the morrow and the cyclone that would tear loose when he heard the sad news about his leg.

It was not until some time after sunrise that he awoke. I *shush-shushed* and evaded his questions until after the doctor—a really competent surgeon—had redressed his wound.

Then I had to come clean. I sat down and retailed the story of the whole miserable fiasco as I had learned it since he was laid low.

The storm was less tempestuous than I had forecast. Joe was horrified, of course, but so weak that he had to be more or less philosophical.

"So Cayetano sold out his tribe," he lamented. "He didn't stay away from Felicia, after all."

"Why did we ever think he would? We ought to have told the chief everything we knew about him—only he seemed so honestly penitent. But it's too late to cry about that now."

"And *El Tigre* got away with my leg. The luck he borrowed got him away, rather, while Jorge was killed and we were captured. Still, it's likely to prove mighty unfortunate for him in the end."

"How do you figure that?"

"Haven't you noticed how the leg usually works with reverse English? It's lucky for me but turns poison on anybody else that monkeys with it. That's something else I didn't tell Gavino; but he'll soon be finding it out."

The governor came to say good-by and to bring the distressing but scarcely unexpected intelligence that Sandoval was determined to hold us for investigation of our activities among the Yaquis. He had informed the colonel that he proposed to take us to Hermosillo, and Sandoval had promptly declared that he was going to do nothing of the sort with aliens guilty of giving aid and comfort to the insurrectos.

"But have no fear," the governor encouraged. "He knows that I am going to telegraph to Mexico City as soon as I reach the palace and tell the president what you were trying to do; so Sandoval will not dare treat you with disrespect. I guarantee that an order for your release shall be here in a day or two."

That we were indeed prisoners was amply apparent when I improvised a crutch for Joe and we sallied forth to find breakfast. Watchful guards lolled after us down the street and smoked ostentatiously in front of the *fonda* where we ate.

About a hundred dragoons, we judged, had taken possession of the town and crowded out most of the regular inhabitants. We circulated among them without restraint, looking for Cayetano, but saw nothing of him.

"Just have to let matters take their course," said Joe. "Can't worry now—head's too heavy. Let me lie down."

A day of unbroken rest did him a world of good. By evening he was as chipper as ever and scheming out some way to get his leg back. But there was nothing that we could do immediately, so we went to bed with the expectation of spending a peaceful night.

It was anything but that. Along about ten o'clock we were hustled out and told to climb aboard a pair of cavalry nags.

I set up a howl, of course, that a crippled and wounded man was in no condition to make a horseback trip.

"Leave the redhead if you like," shrugged Sergeant Cota. "You are to come with my squad. Follow those mules."

Joe wouldn't hear to being left behind and made me boost him into the saddle.

The whole village was astir. The troops were filing out toward the north, along the road by which we had come the night before. Up in front we could hear Sandoval bawling commands.

Atop of one mule we had been told to keep in view was the machine gun that I had repaired; the others were laden with ammunition cases.

"Is there to be a night attack or are we just moving to another base?" I asked Cota.

"An attack, likewise a massacre," he informed us. "We are going to wipe out your friends at last. The colonel's spy is leading us to the new camp where they are assembling for a raid at dawn on San Juan. But while they sit dreaming of victory to-morrow, we shall surround them and—*pouf!*"

"I see. That Cayetano! May he roast for eternity in the deepest pit of hell with *chola* maidens smiling at him from the brink. And I suppose that I'm brought along just in case that Maxim jams again."

"Quién sabe? But do not try to escape. We have orders to shoot to kill."

Joe and I were denied the privilege of witnessing the start of the rout that was mentioned in Nogales dispatches, a week later, as "a minor skirmish in Zopilote Canyon." That was the wooded gorge, by the way, where we had spent several hours of Friday the thirteenth, skulking in a cane thicket with Gavino. Before we got that far up, Sandoval dropped back and directed the machine-gun crew to occupy a brushy knoll in the approximate center of the ravine.

"We shall circle around and drive them this way," said the colonel. "It is better to drive them toward the open mesa than up into the mountains. You will be here to cut off their retreat and mow them down as they appear."

"Very well. Not one shall escape."

"Just a minute," begged Joe. "As the governor must have told you, the Yaquis are ready and willing to surrender. It isn't necessary to butcher the poor devils. They know they're whipped."

"They may have known it yesterday,

gringo, but they know it no longer. I am advised that *El Tigre* has acquired a new luck charm of marvelous power. He has made his deluded followers believe that it is going to turn the tide of war and enable them to overwhelm the legions of *el presidente*."

"Oho! That would be the wooden leg he borrowed from me. Look out for that leg. Colonel Sandoval."

"What nonsense are you talking? I have no time to listen. Adios, sergeant."

"Another thing," insisted Joe. "I am very anxious to recover my leg because I—well, I am almost helpless without it. Tell your men that there is two hundred pesos waiting for the one that brings it to me."

Sandoval was gone. Tense hours dragged monotonously by. I offered no aid in mounting the Maxim but reached the firm resolve that if it jammed this night it should stay jammed, for all of me.

Some time after two a. m. we heard a rifle shot up the canyon. That was all, for several minutes.

Then came a bedlam of shots and yells. The gunfire merged into a steady roar.

Cota bade his men douse their cigarettes and take their places by the gun.

"Here they come!" exclaimed a corporal. "I see them moving there in the manzanita."

"Fire!" barked Cota.

The obsolete "blunderbuss" began to hum, with never a discordant note in its staccato song of death. For ten or fifteen minutes it spat streaks of flame into the shadows. In the intermissions we could determine that the battle was drawing nearer; we could even distinguish the occasional squeal of a stricken horse.

"Stop! Stop, you fools! Stop!"

This agonized entreaty came from our right. We turned to see Sandoval staggering across an open moonlit stretch.

"You are slaughtering 'our own troops. Oh, such bunglers! First one discharges his rifle before I give the signal and alarms the enemy. Then we find the *indios* in our rear. We fight valiantly but are forced back, only to be potted like rabbits by our own machine gun. Such swine! Soldiers? Bah!"

"We did not know, colonel," wailed Cota. "We did not know. But I swear that when the Yaquis do come——"

"Idiot! How will you know whether you are shooting at friend or foe? Throw that gun on the mule and flee."

Sandoval commandeered my horse, his own having been killed under him, and took a place in the van of the terrorized mob now breaking out of the scrub. No one appeared to notice that I cut the pack from an ammunition mule and leaped upon its back.

Joe and I could easily have sneaked away in the darkness and confusion, but we much preferred taking our chances with the federals to the danger of capture by Gavino. So we fogged on down the canyon with the other fugitives.

For some reason the Yaquis did not pursue the Mexicans out of the hills and upon the mesa. That may have been because of one of *El Tigre's* revelations or because he thought his force was too small. At any rate, the rattle of the firing died away. Sandoval's rabble made it to San Juan, reduced twenty-five per cent in numbers and two hundred per cent in morale.

As it was none of our funeral, Joe and I retired to quarters and left Sandoval to the business of calculating his losses and reviling his men. The doctor had his hands full with the wounded.

"Well, my leg hasn't turned sour on Gavino yet," commented Joe. "It's bating a thousand for him, just as it always did for me. I don't know that I begrudge him his borrowed luck, but I sure would like to know how I'm to get it back."

San Juan was a dreary place the next

morning. Sullen troopers lounged around, smoking and cursing their officers and wondering when they would be allowed to return to Hermosillo. They had no ambition whatever to seek revenge for their disgraceful drubbing. We heard rumors of several desertions, also that Sandoval had sent for supplies and reinforcements.

From an adobe that had been a *cantina* before the stock was all consumed, stepped Cayetano, bowing and smiling an oily, hypocritical smile that made me ache to wring his neck.

Joe proceeded to tell him what he thought of him. After he had exhausted his repertoire of Spanish invective, he switched to English. None of that fazed Cayetano, but I contributed a few Yaqui phrases that made the hound wince.

"You do me an injustice, señores," he complained aggrievedly, when we had run out of breath. "I am not an ordinary Yaqui, for my grandmother was a captured Mexican woman. I was born with a taste for better things than cactus wine to drink, burro flesh to eat, and a *jacal* to sleep under. You have seen for yourselves what wretched savages they are.

"Surely no man of intelligence would refuse ease and riches that are to be had for the asking. Why, I am to receive two thousand pesos and an honored position as jailer in a military prison! Besides, Felicia is so beautiful."

Then we aired our opinions of Felicia's beauty. He would not be insulted but protested that we were very, very much mistaken as well as blind.

"After all, it is of no importance what Colonel Sandoval's prisoners think; it is the colonel himself whom I wish to please. Señor Bonner, I hear that you are offering two hundred pesos for your leg."

"I made that offer, yes."

"Does it still stand, and for me?"

"Ye-es. I'd rather give you two hundred cyanide tablets, but I've got to have my peg. The offer still stands, for you or anybody else."

"Adios! Please note that I have witnesses. This evening I shall bring your lost leg."

Cayetano was still unsuspected by the tribesmen whom he had betrayed; they must suppose that he was out scouting for them. His chances to pilfer the leg, therefore, ought to be pretty fair. This was the way that Joe hopefully reasoned.

But for the third time in our experience with Cayetano he failed to return on schedule. Evening came and the night wore on, and still he did not put in an appearance.

I went to bed and persuaded Joe to do the same. He could not sleep but tossed fitfully and ran to the door for every little noise.

Eventually I dozed off, but not for long. Joe hauled me out by the foot.

"He's here. Somebody just rode in from the north. It must be Cayetano with my leg."

I crawled into my clothes and went with him to one of the other cabins, where Mexicans with lanterns were milling about the doorway. We pushed our way inside.

A sorry object lay upon a pallet of corn husks. Over it bent the doctor, scissoring away at the red-stained shirt. We would not have known that it was Cayetano but for the wooden leg that he clutched with his left hand. He was suffering fearfully from the wound.

Joe let out a whoop, seized the leg, strapped it on and went stamping about the dirt floor with grunts of satisfaction.

"Two hundred pesos," croaked Cayetano. "Two hundred pesos for Felicia. You promised."

"Sure!" Joe threw him his wallet. "Keep the change."

"Make way for the colonel," bawled

some one without. "Here comes Colonel Sandoval."

Sandoval, unshaven and bleary eyed, stalked in and gazed down at the wounded spy.

"What happened, Yaqui? Did you seek out *El Tigre* as I instructed?"

"Yes, my colonel. But I could learn nothing of their plans, for they have decided on nothing. Gavino told me to come back and continue my scouting. But I desired to bring the gringo his wooden leg, and so I waited in the bushes many hours before I could tear a hole in the wall of the chief's house and get it.

"As I came away a sentry hailed me. When he saw that I had the leg he shot. I was lucky to escape."

"Aha! So your people have discovered that you turned renegade. That ends your usefulness to me. Captain Rosales, waste on this coyote no dressing or medicines that we need for our own wounded."

"But he is sorely hurt, colonel. Unless he has much doctoring and skillful nursing, he will die."

"So? I know a quicker way than that to dispose of his case. Sergeant Cota, take this captive out and shoot him."

"At sunrise, colonel?"

"Don't wait for sunrise. Shoot him now."

There was nothing in the least heroic or romantic about the execution of Cayetano. Shrieking, he was borne outside. While one private held a lantern, two others tried to stand him against a wall. He would not, could not, stand. So a volley was fired into him as he lay in the dust.

"A worthy task well done," approved Sandoval. "Now, you Americans are *compañeros* and allies of the Yaquis, therefore it shall be your inestimable privilege to inter this wretch. Have shovels brought for the grave diggers, sergeant."

While we were waiting, with decidedly mixed feelings, for the spades to come, an outpost at the south of the village shouted a challenge. Then:

"*Pase Vd.*"

A uniformed horseman galloped up the street, recognized Sandoval in the flickering light, reined in, saluted and handed him a letter.

As Sandoval read, a scowl black as a thundercloud came over his face. He ripped out a lurid oath.

"Orders to withdraw to Hermosillo. There is to be no more fighting until the governor can carry on peace nego-

tiations with *El Tigre*. Always somebody interfering with the army."

"And does the dispatch say nothing about us?" I inquired.

"Yes. Some more official meddling. You are to be released and provided with an escort to the capital.

"Cota, I regret it much, but you will now have to detail a squad to bury the spy."

"Never mind the squad, sergeant," interposed Joe. "This is one Yaqui that Pete Wayland and I will put underground with pleasure. Hurry along with those shovels."

Another of Ernest Douglas' stories will be published soon.



THE CONQUERING HABIT OF MIND

CHANCEY M. DEPEW, who died a few days before his ninety-fourth birthday, often said that he would live to be a hundred years old. It was back in 1926 when the newspaper reporters called on him on his ninety-second birthday, April 23rd, that he gave them eight rules for right living, observance of which, he said, had enabled him to live his long and useful life. They were:

Think about cheerful things.

Always be an optimist.

Don't brood or be morbid.

Don't be angry or hate things.

Cultivate young people.

Be moderate in all things.

If you find your diet is wrong, give up the thing you like best, for that's the thing you will eat most of.

Laugh and make others laugh.

Six of the eight rules counseled optimism, which is, above all others, the conquering habit of mind. The man who develops and clings to optimism possesses the armory in which are forged the weapons that win the battles of life. If he has optimism, he has faith, courage, ambition, and the power to stick. It is the grouch who becomes the prey of discouragement and so lays down on his job.

Men say they cannot cultivate this or that habit. It is because they have not tried. Association with others, even, can put a mental habit into an individual. If he runs with the bright, happy and successful people, their habit of thinking colors his thoughts, and he, too, soon finds himself looking on the bright side of things. If he associates with the gloomy down-and-outers, their depressing attitude injures him, and unless he struggles against it, he adopts their cowardly way of facing life.

If mere companionship can effect his mental outlook so strongly, what limit may be set to his ability to form his own habits of thinking when he resolves to do so? Moreover, the optimistic attitude is easy to cultivate because it is the normal way to think. People, like flowers, are created to look toward the light.

A Chat With You

PICTURE a group of young men sitting around a log fire, or in a café, or at a lunch counter, speculating on the future. Many have done it. You have, perhaps; we have, certainly. The future baffles science, challenges the imagination. What will all of us be doing in twenty-five years? Who can tell? In the newspapers only the other day there was an account of the meeting of several Civil War veterans who, long ago, agreed to meet in twenty-five or thirty years—and they were all there except for one who had passed on. They had changed a lot, but the same undying spirit of comradeship presided over them as ever, making a quarter of a century seem like nothing! They had defeated Father Time, in a way. The affectionate emotions are the most lasting.

* * * *

THOSE of you who have been reading THE POPULAR for a long time are going to have a similar experience, vicariously, in the next number. Do you—but of course you do!—remember “Chip of the Flying U,” that great novel by an old friend, B. M. Bower? It appeared in October, 1904, and was later published as a book, becoming very popular. It was followed by a number of other tales in which the same characters figured. And what great old characters! Seemed like real people, the cowboys of that group called the “Happy Family.” An adventurous, friendly, inseparable bunch.

* * * *

SOMETIMES we catch ourselves wondering whatever happened to them—how they fared in their lives. Just as if they were living persons. Did

such a thought ever strike you? Of course, if it did, you probably stopped just as we did and chuckled: “Why, that’s foolish, because Chip and the Little Doctor and the Old Man, and Mig, Andy, Pink, Weary and the rest were only people in fiction.” But here’s a secret: It wasn’t a foolish thought. Those who read live two lives, each as real as the other. One is the everyday life; the other is the inner life of the mind, the memory. In that last mental world are the people of the storybooks. “Robinson Crusoe” is as actual in your memory as if he had really lived. So are those delightful, lovable cow-punchers of the Flying U, and B. M. Bower will prove that they still live for you, in “Rodeo,” the new serial starting in the next number. You’ll be interested in seeing what the old bunch is like after all these years. And it doesn’t matter if you are a new reader; you’ll enjoy that serial, we promise you. The spirit of it is universal.

* * * *

THOUGHTS are odd in the way they lead from one thing to another. The mention of a log fire a moment ago brings up a vision of the woods—memories of nights under the stars, of a cozy, fragrant pipe, of the warm, intimate comfort of a camp fire—of the mystery of the fireglow, and the deep, Plutonian mystery of the woods and the universe that rise like a cloak around you. You get closer, somehow, to all creation when you’re in the open. It is so hard to speak of it all; there is so much to say. One must feel it. Places have personalities that you sense and love. Rudyard Kipling put it into immortal words when he wrote, in “Man-

delay," that you could "hear the East a-tallin'." We know of a man who loves the woods with all his heart and who writes of them with imagination's brightest ink. He is Clay Perry. Read his complete novel, "The Sun Dancers," in the next issue.

* * * *

YOU wouldn't think, offhand, that the life of a soldier, stationed in a lonely military telegraph post in Alaska, would be very adventurous. We thought that, too, until we read "High Adventure at Teikell," by Captain Ralph R. Guthrie. He knows his Alaska. The soldier in this story goes searching for a lost girl— No; to tell any more

would spoil your fun. That's a yarn for you, though; remember to read it, surely.

A swift change of scene—to a big city. A tale about diamonds, written by a man who knows all about jewelry. James Sayre Pickering can tell you, in vivid, eloquent English, of the romance and the hazards connected with precious gems. His story is announced below. Now, just one last word—a whisper: There's a short story by Leonard Lupton in that number that will give you a unique, pleasurable jolt. A real thrill. Tell your news dealer to reserve that copy of **THE POPULAR** for you, and then, on September 7th, drop in and get it. You'll be glad you did.

THE POPULAR

In the Next Issue, September 7, 1928

The Sun Dancers

A Complete Novel

CLAY PERRY

High Adventure at Teikell

CAPTAIN RALPH R. GUTHRIE

Rodeo

In Four Parts—Part I

B. M. BOWER

White Horse

JAMES SAYRE PICKERING

He Just Dropped In

LEONARD LUPTON

"Face It, M'Son!"

FREDERICK NIVEN

The Very Audacity of Him

HARRY IRVING SHUMWAY

A Chat With You

THE EDITOR

And Other Stories by Favorite Authors

In Years to Come..

*How much of their fascinating childhood
will remain on Memory's page?*

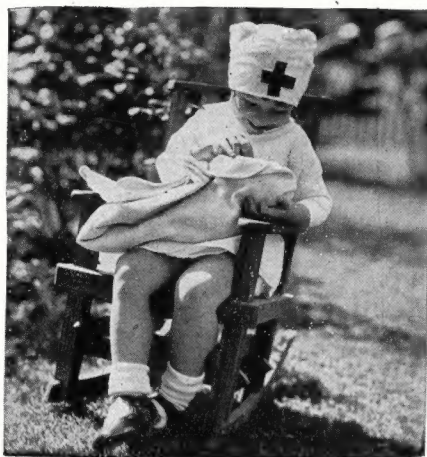


YOU'RE busy now, to be sure. Watching over them. Mothering them. Seeing that they get the right food, enough sleep, plenty of fresh air and sunshine. Doing everything a mother could to make them the finest children in the world.

But don't make the mistake of thinking yourself too busy to take snapshots of them. You love them so much, they are so much your own flesh and blood, that you may think you'll always remember the wonderful days of their childhood.

You think they're just the cutest kids alive, of course. And you love and admire them—oh, ever so much. That's the very reason why later on you would regret your failure to make a picture record of their fascinating childhood. You couldn't possibly take *too many* snapshots. The cry is always "Why didn't I take more?"

How easy it is! We don't need to remind you either of the great pleasure you get in seeing how the prints turn out.



Have your favorite print enlarged. Then frame it and hang it up where you can enjoy it constantly.

From seven-year youngsters to seventy-year oldsters, everyone enjoys the fun of taking snapshots.

The chances are that you already own a Kodak. If you don't, get one at once. They are on sale everywhere at prices to fit any pocketbook. You can buy the Brownie, a genuine Eastman camera, for as little as \$2, and Kodaks from \$5 up.

And every Eastman camera makes excellent snapshots. Particularly the Modern Kodaks. Many have lenses so fast that you don't have to wait for sun-



*They change so quickly.
Snapshots taken now
will be priceless later on.*

shine. Rain or shine, winter or summer, indoors or out, everyone can take good pictures with these marvelous new Kodaks.

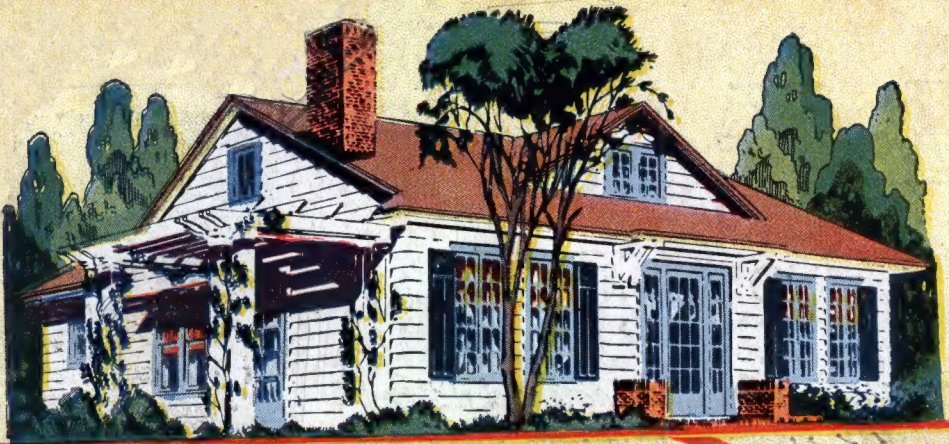
Kodak film in the familiar yellow box is dependably uniform. It has speed and wide latitude. Which simply means that it reduces the danger of under- and over-exposure. It gets the picture. Expert photo finishers are ready in every community to develop and print your films quickly and skilfully. So begin—or continue—taking the pictures that mean so much to you later on.

EASTMAN KODAK CO., Dept. 105
Rochester, N. Y.

Please send me, FREE and without obligation, your interesting booklet telling about the Modern Kodaks.

Name

Address



FREE

"One" of These Homes Is Different From The Rest—IT'S FREE—Can You Find It?

Here are 16 six-room homes,—each one numbered. At first glance they look alike but, only 15 of them ARE exactly alike and "one" and only one is different from all the rest. Can you find the different one? It will be given away **ABSOLUTELY FREE**. Someone who reads this offer can win it. Why not you?

These Clues Will Help You

If you will start at home number 1 and compare it with No. 2; then compare No. 2 with No. 3, etc., until you have compared them all, you will see that "one" and only one is different in some way from all the others. Can you find it. You may find this difference in the trees, shutters, windows, or even the design itself might be different. Be careful because it is not as easy as it looks. If you find the "one" home that is different from all the rest, write the number of it on the coupon below and rush it to me quick with your name and address—TODAY

Built Anywhere in the U. S. A.

The "one" beautiful home that is different from all the rest will be given away **ABSOLUTELY FREE**. It makes no difference where you live. It can be built anywhere in the U. S. A. We even offer to buy a \$1,000.00 lot for you and give you a two-car garage **FREE**. This spacious and beautiful, six-room home may be yours, if you rush the coupon with your solution, name, and address at once. This is your opportunity to get **FREE** a "HOME OF YOUR OWN." Be wise, don't delay.

GIVEN AWAY You can win a six-room home—a \$1,000 lot—and a 2-car garage

ALL THREE can be yours. This luxurious, colonial, six-room home, \$1,000.00 cash for a lot which you can choose in any location you like—and a two-car Lincoln size garage. The home is complete and of the finest quality materials and includes all the plumbing equipment, complete warm-air heating plant, electric wiring equipment and fixtures, etc. Don't lose any time. Duplicate prizes will be paid in case of ties. See if you can find the "one" home that is different and send the number of it to me on the coupon or a postcard quick—Don't delay.

I. M. DITTMAN, 537 So. Dearborn St., Dept. 69, Chicago, Ill.

FREE HOME COUPON

I. M. DITTMAN, Dept. 69,
537 So. Dearborn St., CHICAGO, Illinois.

I would like to win this beautiful home, lot and garage.
I think the different home is number _____

NAME.....

ST. or R. F. D.....

CITY..... STATE.....

**Be Prompt
You Can Win.**

**Act Quick!
Rush This Coupon!**